

Eras

Humanities Through the Ages

Editorial

London Under Danish Rule: Cnut's Politics and Policies
as a Demonstration of Power

Matthew Firth

Marx's Concept of Class and the Athenian Polis

Michael Lazarus

Ned Kelly's Last Words: "Ah, Well, I Suppose"

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Ideological Cynicism in the Modern Information Age
with Sloterdijk and Žižek

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Editorial

Eras was founded in 2001 with the intention of facilitating interdisciplinary dialogue between postgraduate and early career researchers working across all areas of history, archaeology, theology and Jewish Civilisation. In 2010 our scope further expanded to include the disciplines of international studies and philosophy, particularly when such work also contains significant historical content. In 2014, the layout underwent significant redesign under the editorial auspices of Julian Koplin. The redesign is reflected in this current edition, and has helped to transform Eras into a more accessible publication.

Matthew Firth's contribution offers a consideration and reflection of Cnut the Great's siege of London during the millennial year of this event. Firth discusses the initial unsuccessful outcome of the siege by a defiant London population, and how Cnut had to shape a unique policy towards this important city as part of his Anglo-Scandinavian Empire. Michael Lazarus' contribution focuses on the social structure of Classical Athens, within the context of Marx's concept of class. This stresses the value of a Marxist conception of class as a means to clarify the structure of Athenian society at the time. A second contribution from Stuart Dawson resumes the discussion of Ned Kelly, which follows on from his well-received submission *Redeeming Fitzpatrick: Ned Kelly and the Fitzpatrick Incident*, found in Edition 17 of Eras. This current contribution extends the discussion on the mythology surrounding the end of Ned Kelly's life, focusing on his last words in an ignominious end to his life. The last article in Edition 18, by Liyan Gao, adopts and adapts Sloterdijk's notion of cynicism by going beyond this interpretation of cynicism and information. Gao gives regards to the creative powers of the imagination with cynicism, while also providing a critical relationship with new media outside of the traditional traps of cynicism, and extending into the space of transformative politics.

In addition to these referred articles, this issue of Eras contains a number of book reviews. These reviews cover wide-ranging subject material including a detailed discussion of the Abu Ballas Trail in Egypt, Greek theatre in the fourth century BC, philosophy of Christianity, postfeminist digital culture, and the study of Monastic culture. The shorter reviews draw on the reviewers' areas of expertise to critique the works being considered, and to offer insight into the presentation of recent research and evidence within their particular fields of interest.

Eras would not be published if not for the generous help of many disparate individuals. The editorial committee for this issue of Eras comprises Irene Dal Poz, Laura Donati, Stephen Joyce, Julian Koplin, Jessica Lothian, Lucy Mayne, Rosa Martorana, Sarah Ricketts, Kathleen Shaw, and Federico Testa. I would like to thank these individuals for the work they have provided throughout the process of turning the initial papers into referred articles and for also providing editorial comments on the book reviews. Significant appreciation must be expressed to Lucy Mayne for her effort in formatting and producing the final web-ready publication. I would also like to express

my gratitude to Stephen Joyce for his guidance and experience, as well as Rosa Martorana for her wonderful work in sourcing and collating the book reviews. I would also like to offer our gratitude to the numerous publishers who have provided us with review copies of their publications, and the authors who have submitted manuscripts for consideration. Notable thanks are also extended to the academics who have made recommendations or who acted as a peer review for the articles herein. I would like to acknowledge your assistance and the anonymous comments you have provided; without your significant contribution to Eras, the journal would not be possible.

Caleb R. Hamilton
Managing Editor

London Under Danish Rule: Cnut's Politics and Policies as a Demonstration of Power

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Abstract: *In 1016 the young Danish prince who was to become Cnut the Great, King of England, Denmark, and Norway, laid siege to the city of London as part of a program of conquest that would see him crowned as King of England by 1017. This millennial year is an appropriate time to reflect on the consequences of London's defiance as a city that was rapidly evolving into the economic capital of a united English polity. As the siege did not end in Danish victory, the resistance of the independent minded Londoners had implications upon how Cnut would conduct juridical, financial and religious policy in relation to the city. Cnut could not allow the city to exert such oppositional autonomy unchecked. Yet the Danish king had ambitions of establishing an Anglo-Scandinavian Empire and London was a strategically important city in that vision, valued for both its continental connections and its wealth. Cnut could not afford to stunt London's economic life through punitive repression. The Danish king's early years were then characterised by a series of carefully balanced retributive policies that were designed to remove London's agency for rebellion, while not crippling it as an established economic and commercial centre.*

Keywords: *London, Cnut, Æthelred II, Anglo-Saxon history, Anglo-Scandinavian history, Siege of London, Anglo-Saxon historiography*

LONDON UNDER DANISH RULE: CNUT'S POLITICS AND POLICIES AS A DEMONSTRATION OF POWER

For the citizens, having given their prince honourable burial, and having adopted a sound plan, decided to send messengers and intimate their decision to [Cnut], that is to say, that he should give them his pledge of friendship, and should take peaceful possession of the city.

*Encomium Emmae reginae.*¹

¹ Alistair Campbell, trans., *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, ii.7, reprint (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998 (1949)), p. 23.

In 1016, London was one of very few English cities of European significance. This reflected London's prominence as a trading port, an economic and administrative hub, and population centre, rather than any status as a nascent capital city. In 1016 it was also the centre of Anglo-Saxon resistance to the campaigns of conquest undertaken by the Danish prince, Cnut (r. 1016-1035). Throughout Cnut's English offensive, London was a base for the Anglo-Saxon king, and the city supported first the incumbent king, Æthelred II (r. 978-1016), and subsequently declared his son Edmund, king of England in the face of Cnut's aggression. This was despite the capitulation of Wessex and Cnut's proclamation as king by a gathering of leading nobles and clerics in Southampton.² The Danish assaults on London took the form of a series of sieges throughout 1016, with the Danes being driven from the walls by Anglo-Saxon forces before later returning to take-up the siege again.³ Ultimately, the independently minded citizens of the city, with the military aid of the Anglo-Saxon claimant to the throne, held out against the besieging Danes and the siege was not ended by force. Negotiators sent out from the city organised a surrender on behalf of its citizens in exchange for Cnut's pledge of friendship, though the garrison held out.⁴ Unable to take full possession of the city, Cnut withdrew his army and London only came under his rule after the death of Edmund later that year. Once under his rule, London presented Cnut with a complex political puzzle. The king could not allow the city to exert the oppositional autonomy it had displayed in resisting his annexation, yet neither could the economic life of the strategically important city be disrupted by punitive repression. As such, Cnut's twenty year reign saw two approaches to exerting royal power over the city, with punitive policies pursued in the Danish king's early years, slowly moving toward conciliatory policies as Cnut established his authority.

LONDON ON THE CUSP OF DANISH RULE

Winchester had been the pre-eminent Anglo-Saxon royal city since the reign of Alfred (r. 871-899) in Wessex. His successors had extended the Wessex hegemony over rival Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Scandinavian territories, culminating in the establishment of a single Anglo-Saxon kingdom under the rule of Æthelstan (r.924-939). In seizing the Anglo-Saxon throne, Cnut inherited this expanded kingdom and maintained Winchester as his capital. Yet wealth and political power was concentrated in London, and the city had been evolving into his new kingdom's primary economic and administrative centre since the late ninth-century. The city was re-established and fortified by Alfred in 886 after a troubled history which saw it variously controlled by

² R. R. Darlington and P. McGurk, eds., *The Chronicle of John of Worcester: The Annals from 450 - 1066, 1015 - 1016*, trans. Jennifer Bray and P. McGurk. vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 480 - 485; Whitelock, ASC, C 1015 - 1016. Both *John of Worcester* and the ASC record that Cnut's dominance of Wessex in 1015 was reversed by his Anglo-Saxon rival in 1016.

³ Dorothy Whitelock, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (ASC)*, C 1016 (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1965), pp. 94 - 96. These sieges are frequently conflated as 'the siege of London,' a convention I will be following.

⁴ For this version of the resolution of the siege of London, see *Encomium Emmae reginae*, ii.7 - 8.

Kent, East Anglia, Mercia, Wessex and the Danes.⁵ The stability that grew from Alfred's reclamation of the city was critical to London's increasing importance throughout the tenth and eleventh-centuries.

By Æthelred's reign the city had become functionally integral in the kingdom's governance, and Barbara Yorke notes that Æthelred increasingly based himself in London, turning it into his military and administrative base during his conflict with Cnut.⁶ Under Æthelred, London became the primary mint of England, producing a quarter of the country's coinage.⁷ This was far above the output of York (9%), Winchester (12%), or any other minting centre, which may explain both the frequent attacks by raiders on London, and London's military preparedness to repel them.⁸ Yet, only fifty years early Chester had been Æthelstan's primary minting city, and the rapid increase of moneys in London may be tied to increasing economic prosperity.⁹ Æthelred's London was trading with the continent to such an extent that the king was using it as a source of revenue, setting in place edicts to regulate tariffs on foreign merchants trading in the city.¹⁰ This is not an action he is known to have taken elsewhere, and it reflects the ease of continental access to London as opposed to other major cities like Winchester and York. Winchester was an inland administrative centre, not a trading centre, and was not directly accessible by sea. Yorke proposes that the shift of royal residence, administration and even burial to London had a tangible effect on Winchester, as the capital of the Wessex dynasty declined in importance.¹¹ In its turn, York was a wealthy trading centre. However, York faced Scandinavia and may not have competed with London for continental trade; it is notable that Æthelred's London trade regulations did not include Scandinavians, who were presumably accessing York as their primary port.¹² As a prominent centre of trade and administration, York was also the only English city approaching London's population. Archaeological evidence points to London as the largest city of eleventh-century England: as London drew in both trade and royal administration, it also drew in people.¹³ A burgeoning economic, administrative and population centre, it is of little surprise that Cnut sought to annex

⁵ Whitelock, *ASC*, A 886.

⁶ Barbara Yorke, *Wessex in the Early Middle Ages* (London: Leicester University Press, 1995), pp. 147 - 148.

⁷ D. M. Metcalfe, 'Continuity and Change in English Monetary History,' *British Numismatic Journal* 50 (1980), p. 32; M.K. Lawson, *Cnut: The Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century* (London and New York: Longman, 1993), p. 203.

⁸ Metcalfe, 'Continuity and Change,' p. 32; Lawson, *Cnut*, p. 185.

⁹ Peter Sawyer, *The Wealth of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 93.

¹⁰ Æthelred IV.II, in *The Ancient Laws and Institutes of England*, ed. and trans. Benjamin Thorpe, vol. 1 (Printed by command of his late Majesty William IV, 1840), p. 127. For the dating of the law code, see Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century, Legislation and Its Limits*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 443.

¹¹ Yorke, *Wessex in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 324 - 325.

¹² Derek Keene, 'London from the post-Roman period to 1300,' in *The Cambridge Urban History of England*, ed. D. M. Palliser, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 91 - 92.

¹³ Christopher Brooke and Gillian Keir, *London, 800 - 1216: The Shaping of a City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), pp. 70, 100 - 101, 110; Richard Hall, 'York,' in *The Viking World*, ed. Stefan Brink and Neil Price (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), p. 379; Pamela Nightingale, 'The Origin of the Court of Husting and Danish Influence on London's Development into a Capital City,' *English Historical Review* 52 (1987), pp. 563 - 564.

London, and similarly little surprise that the citizenry had both the desire and resources to fight his aggression. Having gathered wealth and political power within its walls, the populous city had the strength to shape its own future. This made London a key economic and military force in Cnut's Anglo-Scandinavian Empire, yet also provided the city with an unrivalled level of self-determination that was politically problematic for the Danish king.

As this discussion portrays London as a unitary body in its relationship with Cnut, it is worth briefly considering the nature of 'London' as conceived as a conglomeration of citizens. While it can be problematic to discuss 'citizenry' in an eleventh-century English city, it is less so with London. Though the citizenry comprised multi-layered social groups with independent needs and opinions, a unity of purpose in protecting their city's interests can be seen in their resolve to keep the Danes from their gates. Already within Æthelstan's reign the city had set out its autonomy, putting in place its own ordinances.¹⁴ These ordinances pledged to follow the king's law, but also put in place rules for the provision of aid and self-policing within the city through a 'peace-gild,' an innovation not seen in any other English city of the early tenth-century.¹⁵ From this time chronicles begin to mention the 'citizens of London' as a body - a term not often associated with other English cities. For example, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* tells us that in 994 the citizens of London brought 'harm and injury' on a fleet of Viking raiders, while the entries relating the raid of Ipswich in 991 and Bamburgh in 993 discuss only the deeds and death of nobility.¹⁶ Similarly, in discussing the siege of London and the city's capitulation, the *Encomium Emmae Reginae* does not isolate a delegation of nobles or clerics, but declares that it was the 'citizens' who organised the treaty.¹⁷ The establishment of a formal London commune 1215 does not reflect a temporally isolated event, but rather the culmination of the city's journey toward self-governance.

THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF CNUT'S RELATIONSHIP WITH LONDON

Recent studies of Cnut's reign as king of the English have lamented the apparent paucity of sources for the Danish king's rule. In his biography of Cnut, Lawson notes that the lack of sources, and their often dubious veracity, limits their facility in establishing any conclusive portrayal of his reign.¹⁸ It is a view that is not without merit, yet relies on comparison with Cnut's immediate predecessor and successors for its verisimilitude. In comparison with the administrative documentation of Æthelred's reign, Cnut may seem poorly served by legislative records, yet it remains that the rich assortment of sources for the Danish king is unrivalled before the late tenth-century. Timothy Bolton highlights Lawson's avoidance of Scandinavian sources in his biography, a conscious decision which facilitates a streamlined analysis, yet comes at

¹⁴ VI Æthelstan, in *English Historical Documents (EHD)*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock, 2nd edn, vol. 1 (London: Eyre Methuen, 1979), pp. 423 - 427.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*; Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, pp. 297 - 298.

¹⁶ Whitelock, *ASC*, C 991, 992 - 994.

¹⁷ *Encomium Emmae reginae*, ii.7.

¹⁸ Lawson, *Cnut*, pp. 66, 214.

the cost of a richer understanding of Cnut's legacy as a figure of inter-cultural importance.¹⁹ Cnut's status as an international monarch provides for a geographically and culturally diverse set of sources, derived from not only Anglo-Saxon England, but also Scandinavia and the Holy Roman Empire. Elaine Treharne in turn correctly asserts that the lack of evidence perceived by Lawson can be characterised by as a lack of administrative evidence.²⁰ While the charters may be few and the law codes derivative, these administrative documents are augmented by chronicles and literary sources such as sagas, biographies and hagiographies. Such sources should be treated with nuance and even scepticism, but they cannot be dismissed outright. It must be concluded that, while the sources for Cnut's kingship are diverse in both nature and quality, there is no shortage of documentation for the reign once chronicles and literary narrative are taken into account.

Cnut's siege of London is particularly well recorded. In England, the siege was reported contemporaneously in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and the praise narrative commissioned by Cnut's wife, *Encomium Emmae Reginae*.²¹ In the Holy Roman Empire, another contemporary chronicler, Thietmar of Merseberg, also made a record of the event, which, while erroneous in detail, corroborates the native sources.²² This distant account is evidence of the significance of Cnut's campaigns in England to the intra-European political landscape. Cnut does not otherwise appear as a major figure in Thietmar's *Chronicon* - the entry for the siege of London is the only record committed to Cnut's activities and contains the *Chronicon*'s sole mention of the city.²³ This can be contrasted with the *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, penned by Adam of Bremen fifty years after the siege, which places the event within a broader narrative of conquest.²⁴ Writing with the benefit of the passage of time, Adam already knew the outcomes of Cnut's campaigning and, from that distance, was able absorb the legacy of a king who had held unrivalled dominance in Northern Europe.

It is unsurprising that later Anglo-Norman chroniclers, similarly writing with knowledge of the key events of Cnut's reign, place the siege of London within the context of Cnut's wider achievements as both conqueror and king. However, while Adam was writing from a location geopolitically removed from Cnut's empire, the English chroniclers were writing in territory still feeling the effects Cnut's reign. As such, they bring an understandable Anglo-centric focus to the narrative, often seemingly disinterested in event elsewhere in Cnut's territories. This fixation on the Cnut's English conquest is also as a result of the near universal dependency of the *Chronicle* for the details of the siege, though it is true that differing accounts of Cnut's

¹⁹ Timothy Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great: Conquest and the Consolidation of Power in Northern Europe in the Early Eleventh Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 1 - 2.

²⁰ Elaine Treharne, *Living Through Conquest: The Politics of Early English, 1020 - 1220* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 10 - 11, 56 - 58.

²¹ *Encomium Emmae reginae*, ii.7 - 8; Whitelock, ASC, C 1016.

²² Warner, David A., trans., *Ottonian Germany: The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg*, 7.40 (1016) (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 335.

²³ *Thietmar of Merseburg*, 7.40 (1016); Thietmar makes brief reference to Cnut at 1.17 and 8.7 (1018), in the latter not mentioning the Danish king by name.

²⁴ Adam of Bremen, *The Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, 2.lii - 2.lv, ed. and trans. Francis J. Tschan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), pp. 91 - 93.

subsequent actions as king are evidence of multiple textual traditions. An example of this can be seen in the entries for 1017 in the chronicle of John of Worcester and the commensurate passage in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta regum Anglorum*.²⁵ John and William were Anglo-Norman historians writing in the early twelfth-century, and both began their entries for 1017 with identical introductions to Cnut's reign. William, however, editorialises, adding that, "there was not justice to his succession, but he arranged his life with great statesmanship and courage".²⁶ Whether William's additional judgement echoes a preserved social memory at Malmesbury Abbey, or an opinion expressed within his sources for Cnut's reign, he does reflect a tradition within English accounts of Cnut's kingship that displays an inherent tension. Cnut would prove himself as a capable, Christian king in the Anglo-Saxon mould, yet his reign began with war and accompanied heavy taxation for his new subjects.

As such, these Anglo-centric traditions of Cnut's conquest and rule reflect Anglo-Saxon narratives that are distinct from those that informed the Scandinavian sagas and historical compilations, our latest written sources. Cnut's appearances in the sagas are not limited to events of historical veracity and, as a Scandinavian king increasing his hegemony and power, Cnut is frequently written into literary sources to fulfil the trope of an unambiguous warrior king, rewarding the deeds of his great men.²⁷ Even Snorri Sturluson, writing the ostensibly historical saga *Óláfs saga Helga*, the story of the sainted king of Norway and rival to Cnut, Olaf (r. 1015-1028), portrays Cnut and his military dominance in a positive light.²⁸ Yet such literary eulogies do not mean that Scandinavian narratives are devoid of historicity and, as Gabrielle Turville-Petre has deftly stated, "*scaldic* verse can tell us little about the history of England, but the history of England may give us confidence in the authenticity of some *scaldic* verses".²⁹

Such is the case with *Knýtlinga saga*, a thirteenth-century compilation recording the history of Cnut's Danish successors, and *Liðsmannaflokkr*, a *skaldic* poem that Russell Poole has suggested was composed by a witness to Cnut's entry into London.³⁰ Both texts are equally intent on eulogising the Danish king. Though Cnut's descendants are the central concern of *Knýtlinga saga*, the introductory chapters celebrate his career through a brief history of his conquests, with his campaigns in England comprising the majority of that history.³¹ Sitting amongst the details of successive battles is a description of the unsuccessful siege of London which, though sparse, does not differ

²⁵ *John of Worcester*, 1017; William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ii.181.1, ed. and trans. R.A.B. Mynors, R.M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 321.

²⁶ *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ii.181.1.

²⁷ See for example: Alison Finlay, trans., *The Saga of Bjorn, Champion of the Hitardal People*, in *The Complete Sagas of the Icelanders*, ed. Viðar Hreinsson, vol. 1 (Reykjavik: Leifur Eiríksson, 1997), p. 262, in which Cnut's party is saved from dragon attack by Björn Arngeirsson hitdœlakappi, who is richly rewarded for his deed.

²⁸ See for example: Snorri Sturluson, *Óláfs saga Helga*, 221 - 227, in *Heimskringla*, trans. Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulks, vol. 2 (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2014), pp. 147 - 215.

²⁹ E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. lxx.

³⁰ For a full discussion of *Knýtlinga saga* and *Liðsmannaflokkr* as historical sources, see Russell Poole, 'Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History: Some Aspects of the Period 1009-1016,' *Speculum* 62 (No. 2, 1987), pp. 265 - 298. See especially pp. 283 - 286 for his analysis of the dating of *Liðsmannaflokkr*.

³¹ Hermann Palsson and Paul Edwards, trans., *Knýtlinga saga* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1986), pp. 26 - 42.

so much from English records to be considered entirely fabricated.³² *Liðsmannaflokkr* does differ, as in form it is intended as praise poetry and has an explicit concern with Cnut's siege of London.³³ Conforming to *skaldic* artistic conventions, the poem deals in complex imagery and tangible detail is elusive. The *skald* does name England three times and the Thames twice, while the only mention of the city name in the final line, "we can settle down now, lady, in beautiful London", has a sense of deliberate revelation as the culmination of the poem's suspense.³⁴ It is clear that *Liðsmannaflokkr's* intent to praise Cnut for his conquest of London. Yet for what the *skaldic* verses of both documents lacks in logistical detail, they make up in extolling the courage and vigour of the warrior king, which is the *skald's* primary concern.

As later literary constructions, such historical sagas and verses do lean toward a slightly more nuanced narrative than the English chronicles. Though paying little attention to political or legislative arrangements in new territories, the saga sources look beyond a simple retelling of the actions of the opposing kings and their faceless armies, and are interested in the roles of other Scandinavian participants in events. This is demonstrated in Snorri's brief mention of the siege of London which is written about the experience of Jarl Eirik, a significant figure in Scandinavian politics, as opposed to those that the English chroniclers considered the main protagonists. Snorri relates Eirik's personal triumph in the conquest of London while providing little practical detail of the siege.³⁵ With this in mind, it is an appropriate place to turn from the historiography of Cnut's relationship with London. For this discussion is not intended to focus on the details and mechanics of Cnut's siege, but is instead interested in how it affected Cnut's attitude to London and his subsequent policies in dealing with its recalcitrant citizenry.

PRE-CNUT SCANDINAVIAN INFLUENCE IN LONDON

Though London had officially been in Anglo-Saxon hands and under the rule of the Wessex dynasty from 886, the city was not devoid of Scandinavian influence at the time of Cnut's conquest.³⁶ In 886, the city had been reclaimed from Viking invaders whose descendants, by 1016, still resided in the Danelaw of northern England. London not only had cause to deal with its Anglo-Scandinavian neighbours, but as a trading port undertook commercial enterprise with Scandinavian merchants and was home to residents of Scandinavian descent.³⁷ Yet, while the evidence for Scandinavian presence in pre-conquest London may be compelling, as Pamela Nightingale has argued, their

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 35 - 37; Alistair Campbell, *Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History* (London: University College London, 1970), pp. 14 - 16; Poole, 'Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History,' pp. 274 - 278.

³³ For a transcription and translation of *Liðsmannaflokkr*, see Poole, 'Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History,' pp. 281 - 283.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Óláfs saga Helga*, 31 - 32 (verse 28).

³⁶ Whitelock, *ASC*, A 886, for Alfred's reclamation of London.

³⁷ Brooke and Gillian, *London, 800 - 1216*, pp. 139 - 142, 264 - 265.

economic importance and political clout can be easily overestimated.³⁸ In laying out the trading regulations for the city, the law code *Æthelred IV* lists the merchants of Flanders, Ponthieu, Normandy and Frankia while making no note of Scandinavian traders.³⁹ The argument that the husting court, the commercial court of London, represented a Scandinavian innovation and basis for power has been neatly dismantled by Nightingale as dependent upon a single anachronistic reference.⁴⁰ Certainly it must be understood that, given the troubled and violent relations between the English and the Danes through the reign of *Æthelred*, Anglo-Scandinavian trade cannot be seen as a key economic factor underpinning the city's commercial strength. However, the presence of six moneyers with Scandinavian names in London during *Æthelred's* kingship must be noted.⁴¹ Nightingale and Lawson both present the presence of only six men of Scandinavian descent amongst the plethora of London moneyers in the period as evidence of the weakness of Danish influence in the city.⁴² Yet it could also be argued that, in the light of the mutual aggression between London and invading Scandinavians, it is a surprise to find any Danish moneyers amongst the Londoners. The minting of coins was a heavily legislated occupation in both the law codes of *Æthelred* and *Cnut*, and the presence of Scandinavian moneyers implies a level of integration and trust, if not influence.⁴³ Nonetheless, whatever the role of the Scandinavian residents of London, they were unable to bring any influence to bear upon the city's Anglo-Saxon elite to declare for *Cnut* on the death of *Æthelred*.

Despite the presence of an integrated Scandinavian population in London, when *Cnut* arrived outside the city in 1016, the citizenry had little reason to hold affection for the Danes within their midst and the king at their gates. With its Anglo-Scandinavian communities, strong Scandinavian trading links out of York and multiple treaties with Scandinavian elites, pre-Norman England is often presented as a part of the Scandinavian North Sea world, yet this was a relationship defined by conflict.⁴⁴ A hyperbole laden record of 793, decrying the depredations of Viking raiders, announced the arrival of the Scandinavians in the pages of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.⁴⁵ The following sixty years saw increased Viking raids which soon turned to settlement and conquest across the British Isles. The Vikings reached the zenith of their power in England in 878, and seeming to have dismantled all of the ancient Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, they extended their hegemony to include the southern territories of Alfred of Wessex. This victory was fleeting: later in that same year Alfred met the Viking

³⁸ Nightingale, 'The Origin of the Court of Husting,' pp. 559 - 561.

³⁹ *Æthelred IV*.II.

⁴⁰ Nightingale, 'Court of Husting,' pp. 559 - 562; Nightingale's refutation is against the argument as presented in: Frank Stenton, 'Norman London,' in *Preparatory to Anglo-Saxon England: Being the collected papers of Frank Merry Stenton*, ed. Doris May Stenton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 30 - 31.

⁴¹ Veronica J. Smart, 'Moneyers of the Late Anglo-Saxon Coinage: the Danish Dynasty, 1017 - 1042,' *Anglo-Saxon England* 16 (1987), pp. 273 - 279.

⁴² Lawson, *Cnut*, p. 206; Nightingale, 'Court of Husting,' p. 560.

⁴³ *Æthelred IV*.26.1, in *EHD*, vol. 1, p. 445 (and n.5); *Cnut II*.8 - 8.2, in *EHD*, vol. 1, pp. 455 - 456.

⁴⁴ See for example: Peter Johaneck, 'Merchants, Markets and Towns,' in *The New Cambridge Medieval History: Volume III, c.900 - c. 1024*, ed. Timothy Reuter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 87 - 90.

⁴⁵ Whitelock, *ASC*, D 793.

armies of southern England in battle and, in defeating them, forced their capitulation and exit from the south of the island.⁴⁶ While London was part of the territory apportioned to Alfred in the subsequent treaty, the city remained in Viking hands for another ten years.⁴⁷ Meanwhile, the Danish presence in northern and eastern England proved to be permanent. A Scandinavian king continued to reside in York and the idea of an autonomous Scandinavian kingdom proved tenacious and a constant threat to the Wessex hegemony. Alfred's descendants were in frequent conflict with the Anglo-Danish leaders as they sought to establish Anglo-Saxon dominance in the north, and the northern chronicles reports that Anglo-Scandinavian Northumbria only became an integrated part of Anglo-Saxon England in 950s. Entries for the period 948-954 in both the *Gesta Regum*, traditionally attributed to Symeon of Durham, and the D-text of the *Chronicle*, describe the overthrow of Eirik Bloodaxe, the incarceration of the Archbishop of York, and imply the installation of earls as rulers of York in the stead of a king.⁴⁸

Closer to the events of Cnut's conquest, the raiding Vikings of Thorkell the Tall landed in Sandwich in 1009 and, over the subsequent two years, the Danes raided Anglo-Saxon territories with impunity.⁴⁹ Though the *Chronicle* entry for 1010 records the Vikings as having "often attacked the borough of London", the city remained impenetrable.⁵⁰ This was not the case with Canterbury, which was betrayed into their hands and raided for wealth and hostages, amongst whom was Archbishop Ælfheah.⁵¹ Æthelred had already opened negotiations with Thorkell's army, yet this event seems to have forced the capitulation, and London held the dubious honour of being the place where the Anglo-Saxon king paid a tribute of 48,000 pounds to the Danes for peace. Requesting an additional 3,000 pounds for the release of the Archbishop, Ælfheah declined to be ransomed and the angered Danes martyred him, with the Anglo-Saxons bearing his body back to London in honour and interring it at St Pauls.⁵² Yet neither the tribute, nor this final burst of violence brought London peace from the Viking raiders.

In 1013, Cnut's father Sweyn, the King of Denmark and Norway, invaded England. While Sweyn's own siege of London failed, with the *Chronicle* declaring that "the citizens...resisted with full battle", his depredations of the rest of England soon convinced the Londoners that resistance was unprofitable and induced their

⁴⁶ Whitelock, *ASC*, A 878.

⁴⁷ Whitelock, *ASC*, A 886; 'The Treaty between Alfred and Guthram,' in *EHD*, vol. 1, pp. 416 - 417.

⁴⁸ Thomas Arnold, ed., *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia*, 948 - 952, vol. 2, reprint (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012 (1885)), pp. 126 - 128; Whitelock, *ASC*, C 948 - 954. For a detailed discussion of the discrepancies in the chronology of Eirik's reign between these two sources, see Clare Downham, 'The Chronology of the Last Scandinavian Kings of York, AD 937 - 954,' *Northern History* XL (no. 1, 2003), pp. 43 - 49.

⁴⁹ Whitelock, *ASC*, C 1009 - 1011, the entry for 1011 itemises the territories overrun by the marauding Danes.

⁵⁰ Whitelock, *ASC*, C 1010.

⁵¹ *John of Worcester*, 1011; *Thietmar of Merseburg*, 7.43; Whitelock, *ASC*, C 1010. Thietmar erroneously names the Archbishop as Dunstan.

⁵² Whitelock, *ASC*, C 1011 - 1012; Osborn, *Translatio Sancti Ælfegi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi et matris*, O.2, trans. Rosemary Morris and Alexander R. Rumble, in *The Reign of Cnut: King of England, Denmark and Norway*, ed. Alexander Rumble (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1994), p. 295.

capitulation.⁵³ Nonetheless, it is reasonable to assume that the Londoner's reluctant submission only entrenched a burgeoning resentment to Danish rule. While Sweyn was declared King of England, when he died five short weeks later it was Æthelred that was returned to power, rather than Sweyn's son Cnut.⁵⁴ Here, in Sweyn's kingship, we see both the basis for the legitimacy of Cnut's claim to the English throne and the genesis of his military and political conflicts with the citizenry. In London's history of dogged resistance to foreign aggression from 1009 up to Cnut's siege, Cnut would have seen evidence of an intolerable intransigence.

CONTROLLING LONDON: CNUT'S PUNITIVE POLICIES

In considering Cnut's early policies in relation to the city and their potentially punitive nature we will consider the charters, taxes, and juridical and religious policies that either guided or reacted to events in London. In the case of the charters of Cnut's reign, Lawson's lament as to the paucity of administrative evidence certainly holds true.⁵⁵ There are forty-six extant charters and writs that reference Cnut, and of these only twenty-three are deemed to be unquestionably authentic, and only one relates to London and this to the city's bishop.⁵⁶ This raises three possibilities which must be examined. Firstly, the lack of charters may represent a conscious punitive policy in which Cnut determined to give nothing of benefit to the lay people of London. Alternatively, the scarcity of grants could represent a recognition of London's pre-conquest status as an economic and political centre, and as the kingdom's primary trade port, and a desire to maintain the status quo. In this case, Cnut may have deliberately avoided any partisan show of favour, any gift of wealth or land, which had the potential to effect an abrupt shift in the balance of power that would disrupt the city's operations. Or lastly, the paucity of documentation may simply reflect a different cultural attitude to record keeping being imposed on the Anglo-Saxon administrators by a new Scandinavian elite.

Turning to the latter hypothesis first, the dearth of English governmental charters and writs in this period certainly seems commensurate with the semi-literate style of administration in Cnut's other kingdoms.⁵⁷ While no charters exist that record immediate post-conquest transfers of land to Scandinavian elites, it is reasonable to assume that land grants did occur as the Danish king rewarded his followers and established Danish hegemony.⁵⁸ Though Anglo-Saxon clerical administration was maintained largely intact, Lawson suggests that grants to Scandinavians may not have

⁵³ Whitelock, *ASC*, C 1013; Gwynn Jones, *A History of the Vikings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 366 - 369.

⁵⁴ Whitelock, *ASC*, C 1014; Ian Howard, *Swein Forkbeard's Invasions and the Danish Conquest of England, 991 - 1017* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003), pp. 133 - 135.

⁵⁵ Lawson, *Cnut*, p. 206.

⁵⁶ King's College London, *The Electronic Sawyer: Online catalogue of Anglo-Saxon charters (ES)*, accessed 20 January 2016, <http://esawyer.org.uk/about/index.html>, S 949 - 992, S 1463, S 1642 - 1643.

⁵⁷ Lawson, *Cnut*, p. 66; Treharne, *Living Through Conquest*, pp. 80 - 81.

⁵⁸ Ann Williams, 'The Spoliation of Worcester,' in *Anglo-Norman Studies* 19, (1997), pp. 383 - 384.

been recorded as their shared culture with the king was one in which such administrative formalities were not established.⁵⁹ In an innovative and detailed analysis of onomastic evidence in the Domesday Book, Lewis has argued for a significant reallocation of land to Danes in the years 1016-1066 throughout the traditional Anglo-Saxon territories in the south-west.⁶⁰ Any distribution of lands to his followers in this territory would have been politically astute for Cnut: south-western England traditionally been firmly held by Anglo-Saxon with little Danish influence. In considering that little direct evidence survives to give evidence of such grants, Lewis' and Lawson's hypotheses complement each other; unrecorded grants to Cnut's followers were likely. Turning to those charters that do survive, although they do not provide direct insight into Cnut's relationship with the institutions of London, they do show evidence of a similar southern territorial focus and preponderance towards ecclesiastical land-holdings. Most of the authentic charters relate to the area of wider Wessex, including both Kent and Cornwall, with fifteen of these being ecclesiastical grants.⁶¹ The only charter made to a London institution is made to the bishop of London and is merely a confirmation of lands held by St Pauls, not a grant of additional land.⁶² Just as the greater number of formal charters in the south seem to relate to a greater number of unrecorded grants, it can be conjectured that the single London charter relates to a limited number unrecorded grants in London.

Having established that a cultural reticence to administrative documentation may indeed be at play, we can now consider whether the lack of charters may also represent a punitive or practical political policy toward London. As reflected by William of Malmesbury's assertion that Cnut "arranged his life with great statesmanship and courage", Cnut's administration of England was remembered for the king's ability to adapt to the mould of Anglo-Saxon kingship and establish stability by appealing to the established power-structures of his new realm.⁶³ John of Worcester supports this tradition of Cnut's kingship, telling that, in 1017, Cnut, "concluded a treaty with the nobles and the whole people ... confirmed a firm friendship between them with oaths ... and set at rest all their own animosities".⁶⁴ As Bolton has highlighted, Cnut's preferred method of administrative control throughout England was to establish a small contingent of Scandinavian elites above local Anglo-Saxon nobles and administrators who retained their pre-conquest positions.⁶⁵ It can, therefore, be posited that Cnut followed a similar approach in London and it is difficult to argue that Cnut was undertaking a punitive policy by denying citizens access to land grants and rights. To upset the balance of power amongst the city's powerful citizens and institutions by

⁵⁹ Lawson, *Cnut*, p. 66.

⁶⁰ C. P. Lewis, 'Danish Landowners in Wessex in 1066,' in *Danes in Wessex: The Scandinavian Impact on Southern England, c. 800 - c. 1100*, ed. Ryan Lavelle and Simon Roffey (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2016), pp.172 - 211. See particularly pp. 196 - 198 for a summation of his argument.

⁶¹ S 949 - 950, 955 - 956, 960 - 961, 963 - 964, 969 - 972, 974 - 975, 978 - 979, 983, 1642 - 1643, for southern charters. S 949 - 950, 956, 964, 967 - 968, 972 - 975, 977 - 979, 1642 - 1643, for ecclesiastical charters.

⁶² S 978, in consideration of those charters deemed of unquestioned authenticity only.

⁶³ *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ii.181.1.

⁶⁴ *John of Worcester*, 1017.

⁶⁵ Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great*, p. 69.

altering rights and territorial holdings would have been counter to his broader administrative policies and resulted in the disruption of the economic life of the city.⁶⁶ Though the city was garrisoned by Danish troops, Cnut could not have governed such a large and autonomously minded populous by coercion alone, without the support of the London's leaders, and as such, it seems likely that the existing system of city governance was retained.⁶⁷ With this in mind, it seems that the few extant charters are symptomatic of political practicalities and Cnut sought to ensure that whatever punitive measures he would undertake against the city, London remained a vibrant trading port.

Yet London's importance as an economic centre could not insulate it entirely from any retributive action for its resistance to Cnut's conquest. Hill has argued that Cnut, through his "efforts to embellish Winchester as capital", immediately undertook a punitive program to marginalise London's political influence and demonstrate his power over the future of the city.⁶⁸ This view of Cnut's policies toward London is perhaps taking the argument for punitive measures a little far. As a conquering king and an outsider, legitimacy was an important concern for Cnut and, by establishing a court based in the ancient city of the Anglo-Saxon kings of Wessex, Cnut was associating himself with the native dynasty he had displaced, thereby maintaining an illusion of continuity. Cnut's punitive policies are clearer in his demonstrations of juridical, financial and religious power over the city. In order to examine these factors I will examine three events from early in Cnut's reign: the execution of the treacherous Eadric Streona, the levying of a *geld* from London independent of that paid by England collectively, and the translation of the relics of St Ælfheah from London to Canterbury.⁶⁹ These represent the few political events that are firmly set within the city during the early years of Cnut's reign and, as such, all three are frequently referred to in scholarship to establish Cnut's attitude towards the administration of London.⁷⁰ That throughout Cnut's first decade of kingship the chroniclers deemed these three incidents alone of suitable significance to warrant record speaks to the political importance of the events within his reign.

A DEMONSTRATION OF JURIDICAL POWER

The execution of Eadric Streona in 1017 was a political action which was as much practical expedient as juridical demonstration. Eadric was an Ealdorman in the Anglo-

⁶⁶ Pamela Nightingale argues strongly for the increasing importance of London from Cnut's reign and its importance as a political, military and revenue centre throughout the reign of Cnut, Nightingale, 'Court of Husting,' pp. 566 - 570.

⁶⁷ Nightingale, 'Court of Husting,' pp. 563 - 564; Matthew Townend, 'Contextualizing the Knútsdrápur: skaldic praise-poetry at the court of Cnut,' *Anglo-Saxon England* 30 (2001), pp. 167 - 168.

⁶⁸ David Hill, 'An Urban Policy for Cnut?' in *The Reign of Cnut*, ed. Alexander R. Rumble (London: Leicester University Press, 1994), pp. 103 - 104.

⁶⁹ *John of Worcester*, 1017 and Whitelock, ASC, F 1017 for Eadric's execution; Whitelock, ASC, C 1018 for the payment of the *geld*, Osborn, *Translatio* and Whitelock, ASC, D 1023 for the translation of St Ælfheah.

⁷⁰ Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great*, pp. 86 - 88; Hill, 'An Urban Policy,' pp. 103 - 104; Brooke and Keir, *London, 800 - 1216*, p.24; Townend, 'Contextualizing the Knútsdrápur,' p.167.

Saxon territory of Mercia and proved to be a politically problematic figure for both the Anglo-Saxon and Danes. The *Chronicle* records that, at the start of Cnut's campaign in 1015, Eadric was fighting for Æthelred.⁷¹ By the end of the year he was fighting for Cnut. In 1016, after Æthelred's death, Eadric ostensibly returned to the Anglo-Saxon fold, only to betray Æthelred's successor on the field of battle and grant the victory to Cnut.⁷² Throughout the two year campaign, the C-text of the *Chronicle* lays the blame for the betrayal and execution of four rival thegns at Eadric's feet.⁷³ By 1017, having taken control of all England, Cnut divided England into four administrative districts and gave overlordship of Mercia to Eadric. Yet by the end of the year Eadric was executed in London; his king, in the words of John of Worcester, "fear[ing] that someday he would be entrapped by Eadric's treachery, just as Eadric's former lords Æthelred and Edmund".⁷⁴

The political expedient of executing a powerful thegn who had proved himself capable of treachery on numerous occasions is clear. Yet such an execution was not a simple matter of nullifying an individual rival for power. For, to publically execute a powerful thegn, one who had both served and betrayed the previous administration, was to demonstrate both Cnut's juridical power of life and death over his new subjects of all ranks. As such, we must give consideration to the staging of the execution and the message Cnut was providing to his new subjects in doing so. The evidence is that Eadric's execution took place in London with the traitorous thegn executed to the instruction of the intransigent city. The little studied F-text of the *Chronicle* provides the earliest reference to the execution occurring in London and indicates that he was "killed most justly".⁷⁵ The F-text of the *Chronicle* is a late eleventh-century redaction based primarily on the E-text with interpolations from the A-text, neither of which references the execution occurring in London.⁷⁶ This likely reflects an extant tradition present either in local oral narrative or antecedent texts that do not survive, rather than authorial invention; the F-text author was based at Canterbury, in geographical proximity to London and with access to regionally specific sources.⁷⁷ More importantly, the nomination of London as the location of Eadric's execution proved tenacious in later chronicles with no dependency on the F-text.

There is significant variety in the records of Eadric's death. Of note, and the guide in this discussion, is John of Worcester who, writing in the early twelfth-century, was a vociferous critic of the Mercian Ealdorman that "surpassed all men of that time, both in malice and treachery and in arrogance and cruelty".⁷⁸ John reveals that Eadric was executed in London due to Cnut's fears of his inconstant nature, and that Cnut further

⁷¹ Whitelock, *ASC*, C 1015.

⁷² Whitelock, *ASC*, C 1016.

⁷³ Whitelock, *ASC*, C 1015 - 1016, Sigferth and Morcar in 1015, Uhtred and Thurcetel in 1016.

⁷⁴ *John of Worcester*, 1017.

⁷⁵ Charles Plummer, ed., *Two of the Saxons Chronicles Parallel*, F 1017 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), p. 154 (n. 2), my translation from Latin text.

⁷⁶ Whitelock, *ASC*, xvii, E 1017 (especially n. 4).

⁷⁷ Whitelock, *ASC*, xvii.

⁷⁸ *John of Worcester*, 1007.

ordered that Eadric's body be "thrown over the city wall and left unburied".⁷⁹ The publically visible body of the traitor served as an unambiguous warning. William of Malmesbury, writing around the same time as John and from similar sources, goes further than John in his impassioned denunciations of the Mercian.⁸⁰ However, contrary to John, William declares that the act of ensuring that Eadric's "disgusting spirit was transferred to hell" was a private affair and his body disposed of in the Thames.⁸¹ Yet in his vehemence, William's narrative takes on a semblance of hagiographical polemic with which it is difficult to credit any truth without any extant correlating record. The *Encomium Emmae reginae*, our most contemporary account of Eadric's execution, is also a difficult source. Having been commissioned by Emma of Normandy, queen to both Æthelred and Cnut and mother of two kings, it is intended to both praise and absolve the events of her difficult political life.⁸² Nonetheless, in narrating Eadric's death, the *Encomium* does reflect English traditions that Eadric was central to the English defeat and correlates with John's assertion that the execution was a punitive exemplar, though it does not provide a location for the event. The *Encomium* declares that Eadric was beheaded "with a mighty blow, so that soldiers may learn from this example to be faithful, not faithless, to their kings".⁸³ John further records that six other English thegns died alongside Eadric and that they were subjected to the same treatment.⁸⁴ It is evident that this was a political purge, and an implicit visual warning to the citizens of London. The rotting corpses of seven English lords their new king had deemed traitors could leave the citizenry in no doubt of their fate were they to renew hostilities with their Danish overlord.

A DEMONSTRATION OF FINANCIAL POWER

John of Worcester's subsequent entry demonstrates Cnut's continued retributive attitude to the city, for in 1018 the citizenry was required to pay a tribute of £10,500 to the Danish army.⁸⁵ This *geld* was in addition to the £72,000 required from the rest of Cnut's English territories.⁸⁶ In monetary value, this *geld* dwarfed any payment to Scandinavian kings before or after Cnut's reign, and the amount paid by London would be unequalled throughout the medieval period.⁸⁷ As such, it is natural that historians have cast doubt on the veracity of either figure.⁸⁸ In addressing the larger figure, Gillingham posits that the author of the 1018 *Chronicle* entry, as a later redactor, is

⁷⁹ *John of Worcester*, 1017.

⁸⁰ See for example: *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ii.165.9, ii.180.6 - 7.

⁸¹ *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ii.181.1.

⁸² Elizabeth M. Tyler, 'Talking about history in eleventh-century England: the *Encomium Emma Reginae* in the court of Harthacnut,' *Early Medieval Europe* 13 (No. 4, 2005) pp. 359 - 360.

⁸³ *Encomium Emmae reginae*, ii.15.

⁸⁴ *John of Worcester*, 1017.

⁸⁵ *John of Worcester*, 1018; Whitelock, *ASC*, C, D 1018 (E, F erroneously state 11,000 pounds).

⁸⁶ Whitelock, *ASC*, C 1018.

⁸⁷ Nightingale, 'Court of Husting,' pp. 573 - 574.

⁸⁸ See for example: Brooke and Keir, *London, 800 - 1216*, p.24; John Gillingham, "'The Most Precious Jewel in the English Crown': Levels of Danegeld and heregeld in the early eleventh-century," *English Historical Review* 104 (No. 411, 1989), pp. 383 - 384.

imposing a plausible fiction on the past. Aware of Cnut's reputation for heavy taxation, the chronicler continues the upward trajectory of *geld* amounts imposed throughout the reign of Æthelred into that of Cnut.⁸⁹ On the specific matter of the London *geld*, Gillingham speculates that the chronicler may have mistook a record of an agreement made *in* London for the payment of £10,500 as an agreement *by* London to pay that amount.⁹⁰ Though such assertions are impervious to tangible proof, they are nonetheless logical and plausible. Gillingham is reminding us that the records for Cnut's reign were often written at a temporal or chronological remove, or with a specific ideological focus, and as such they must be read with caution and even scepticism.

Nonetheless, Yorke has asserted that 'the amounts seem feasible in terms of the country's wealth and the amount of coin in circulation' and, in their biographies of Cnut, both Lawson and Bolton, have accepted the veracity of London's £10,500 *geld* without debate.⁹¹ However, Lawson has written extensively on the London *geld* elsewhere, suggesting that the £10,500 has the semblance of a precise figure derived from the pre-conquest Anglo-Saxon administrative system.⁹² He further argues that, given the city's regular resistance to raiders, the *geld* placed on the city reflected the resources the Scandinavians thought it to contain.⁹³ Considering London's role as the kingdom's key trading port and its large minting program, alongside an otherwise unsupported record of a *geld* in 1016 in Thietmar's *Chronicon*, Lawson ultimately declares the £10,500 "squeezed London very hard", but was not "an impossibility".⁹⁴ Gillingham's contrasting exhortation to caution notes that, even in the larger and wealthier London of the late thirteenth-century, the crown could only rely on formal taxation of up to £2,860.⁹⁵ Yet Cnut's one-off *geld* is not commensurate with an established property tax, and the direct payment of the latter by effected citizens has no bearing on the city's collective ability to raise the former. Any direct analysis as to the proportion of the *geld* against either city revenues or set taxation in 1018 would be speculative, the paucity of documentation for Cnut's reign has already been noted. It is likely that London was already supplying a significant amount to the *gelds* raised throughout Æthelred's reign, and London *geld* may simply be the first instance of this in the written record.

That Cnut felt the imposition of such a large tax on his new territories was necessary was a result of his need to reward his conquering army.⁹⁶ As such the tax was at once punitive and practical. While the financial burden on the city must be viewed in part as a retributive act, the specific imposition of such a proportionally large tax on the Londoners also represented the proportionally large effort besieging London required

⁸⁹ Gillingham, 'The Most Precious Jewel,' p. 383.

⁹⁰ Gillingham, 'The Most Precious Jewel,' p. 383 (n. 6).

⁹¹ Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great*, pp. 86 - 87; Lawson, *Cnut*, p. 83; Yorke, *Wessex in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 140 - 141.

⁹² M. K. Lawson, "'Those Stories Look True': Levels of Taxation in the Reigns of Aethelred II and Cnut," *English Historical Review* 104 (No. 411, 1989), pp. 391, 395.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 400.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*; Thietmar of Merseburg, 7.40 (1016).

⁹⁵ Gillingham, 'The Most Precious Jewel,' p. 383 (n. 4).

⁹⁶ Lawson, *Cnut*, p. 83; Lawson, 'Those Stories Look True,' p. 395.

in Cnut's campaign of conquest. Bolton has posited that the *geld* fell foremost on the church in retribution for the clergy's support of Æthelred and, more specifically, the bishop's role in encouraging the resistance in his episcopacy.⁹⁷ There is little evidence to support this view and, though the church undoubtedly provided a portion of the required money, it seems likely that Londoners, as a theoretical economic community, were made to pay collectively for their intransigence. Which is to suppose, not unreasonably, that by 1018 Cnut had an understanding of the economic wealth in which the city's power was based, which was not merely invested in the church. It also supports the idea presented by Lawson that Cnut came to the kingship with an impression of the city's wealth from past Scandinavian raiding experiences.⁹⁸ That there is no record of resistance to the collection of the *geld seama* to indicate that both the king and the city felt the amount was payable. It is unlikely that Cnut would have imposed a *geld* that risked inciting an uprising in the city that had so successfully held out against him in 1016. This line of reasoning brings us to the conclusion that the *geld* was not intended only as a punishment or a financial expedient, rather it was a tool to proactively arrest London's ability to resist Danish rule. To once more quote Lawson, £10,500 "squeezed London very hard", but it was payable. The amount was significantly high in order to damage the city's ability to finance rebellion, but not so high as to cripple the entrepreneurial ventures of the city's merchant elites.

A DEMONSTRATION OF RELIGIOUS POWER

This is not to say that the London church was not a target for Cnut's punitive measures, for the church was certainly an integral part of the community that had resisted Cnut's kingship. Yet it was in targeting the symbols of power of the London episcopacy that Cnut evidently saw the greatest potential for the re-ignition of the city's hostilities. In 1023, Cnut determined to translate the relics of the martyred Archbishop Ælfheah to Canterbury, the seat of Ælfheah's archbishopric.⁹⁹ The motivation was fourfold. First, through the practice of pilgrimage, relics were a source of income to a church and by relocating the cult of Ælfheah to Canterbury, Cnut was removing a revenue stream from the London bishopric.¹⁰⁰ Secondly, the circumstance of Ælfheah's death meant that his cult was necessarily anti-Scandinavian. This made the saint's cult a natural rallying point for a city already inclined toward resistance to Danish rule; Cnut's removal of Ælfheah's relics removed this focal point.¹⁰¹ Thirdly, the choice of Ælfheah's new home will have been seen as a respectful nod to his status in life as Archbishop of Canterbury. Cnut's professed dedication and respect allowed the cult to be appropriated by the King, reorienting it to a more Cnut-friendly footing, if not

⁹⁷ Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great*, pp. 86 - 87.

⁹⁸ Lawson, 'Those Stories Look True,' p. 382.

⁹⁹ Whitelock, *ASC*, D 1023.

¹⁰⁰ Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great*, p. 87.

¹⁰¹ Alexander R. Rumble, 'From Winchester to Canterbury: Ælfheah and Stigand - Bishops, Archbishops and Victims,' in *Leaders of the Anglo-Saxon Church: From Bede to Stigand*, ed. Alexander R. Rumble (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012), pp. 171 - 172.

necessarily a Scandinavian-friendly footing.¹⁰² Lastly, we must not lose sight that both the removal of revenue and the appropriation of the cult coalesce in Cnut's continued desire to enact "political gestures of potency" over the city.¹⁰³ It is unlikely that such inimical gestures will have gone unnoticed by the citizens and, according to Osbern's *Translatio Sancti Ælfeigi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi et matiris*, Cnut had to plan the removal of the saint's body with the precision of a military campaign for fear of aggressive resistance by the Londoners.¹⁰⁴

Yet there is a duality in the presentation of the translation narrative. Osbern informs us that Cnut sent his Danish troops to the gates of the city to provide diversions and set others to guard "the bridge" and the banks of the Thames "so that the people of London would not be able to stand in the ways of those leaving with the saint's body".¹⁰⁵ He further records the reaction of the serving archbishop, who had been called by Cnut to London, upon hearing the king's intent:

Let Almighty God not blame you, my Lord King, for wishing to do this and for not telling me the purpose of your mind, so that I might have come better equipped and better prepared for it all, lest I should be cut down and die in the middle of such a great city.¹⁰⁶

However, these representations of a city prepared for revolt do not have a bearing upon the moral rectitude of the *dramatis personae*. Cnut's act, couched in terms of a vision from the saint, is enacted with the aid of miraculous feats of strength and upon arrival in Canterbury the citizens run in joy to greet their "father in life and companion in death".¹⁰⁷ This attitude to the translation as a just act is similarly presented in our companion sources, the *Chronicle*, John of Worcester and William of Malmesbury.¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, it is probable that the removal of Ælfheah's relics from London was a punitive measure.¹⁰⁹ The reasons for Cnut relocating the saint's cult to Canterbury are logical and compelling. That these motivations are mixed in with hagiographical rhetoric means the increased difficulty of the act bestows both enhanced power on the saint and evidences the sanctity of the participants. The details of the translation recorded in the *Translatio Sancti Ælfeigi* are not elsewhere independently attested, with other sources simply noting that Ælfheah's relics were removed to Canterbury without embellishment. Yet it remains that, whether or not the citizens of London intended to resist Cnut's decision to move the remains, it was nonetheless a political act motivated by Cnut's desire to impose his rule on the city.

¹⁰² Lawson, *Cnut*, p. 140 - 141.

¹⁰³ Townend, 'Contextualizing the Knútsdrápur,' p.167.

¹⁰⁴ Osbern, *Translatio*, T.3 - T.6.

¹⁰⁵ Osbern, *Translatio*, T.4.

¹⁰⁶ Osbern, *Translatio*, T.6.

¹⁰⁷ Osbern, *Translatio*, T.2, T.7 - T.8.

¹⁰⁸ *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ii.181.5; *John of Worcester*, 1023; Whitelock, *ASC*, D 1023.

¹⁰⁹ See for example: Hill, 'An Urban Policy,' p. 103; Lawson, *Cnut*, p. 140 - 141; Rumble, 'From Winchester to Canterbury,' pp. 171 - 172; Townend, 'Contextualizing the Knútsdrápur,' p.167.

CONCLUSION

The translation of Ælfheah's relics in 1023 seems to have been among Cnut's final depredations of the Londoners. Subsequently, a charter that has been noted was promulgated to reaffirm the holdings of St Paul's, and a writ of the 1030's confirmed its financial and juridical rights.¹¹⁰ A decade after conquering England it seems that Cnut understood himself to hold enough authority with the people of London to once again allow its enterprising citizens to forge their own way. It is worth reiterating that it was not in Cnut's interest that the economic life of his new kingdom's foremost city be crushed by punitive repression. Cnut's selected methods of didactic retribution seem to have been calculated to punish, but not cripple. The execution of Eadric, the removal of Ælfheah's remains and the levying of the *geld* were all repressive exemplars, and the latter two were undoubtedly financially disruptive, yet none stopped the city's operations as an economic and political centre.

Cnut, Æthelred and London itself had all understood the intrinsic importance of the city to England's prosperity and rule. As both an economic and population centre unrivalled elsewhere in the country, the city was a critical holding for both the Anglo-Saxon king and the Danish king. Yet the power and autonomy that the population and wealth engendered allowed London to forge its own way in what were perceived to be its best interests. Indeed, for all Cnut's endeavour, he never conquered the city through siege and it was, in each instance, the decision of the city to capitulate that placed it at the Danish king's mercy. Cnut's success in bringing England into his Anglo-Scandinavian empire was not to be foreseen and, given London's dogged resistance to the Viking raiders of earlier times, it is understandable that the Londoners sought to hold out against yet another invading army. Yet Cnut could not allow the city to exert such oppositional autonomy and, in the early years of his reign, Cnut sought to break that autonomy without breaking balance of power in the kingdom's burgeoning economic centre of power. Cnut's demonstrations of political power over London were facilitated through his juridical, tax and religious policies in the city. None of the resultant events seemed to destabilise the city and there is no noted instance where, after 1016, the city ever rose up in opposition to Cnut's punitive policies. Whether the city was cowed by the retributions pursued in the Danish king's early years, or determined to preserve its pre-eminence through a semblance of compliance, Cnut seemed satisfied by the comportment of the Londoners and began the move toward conciliatory policies. Yet despite all of Cnut's activity, the intrinsic character of the city remained unchanged. At Cnut's death in 1035, London remained as it had been in 1016: an independently minded city, an economic centre of power, and determined to write its own destiny.

¹¹⁰ S 978, S 992. S 992 holds some anachronistic properties, however is likely a copy of an earlier document, Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great*, p. 88.

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Marx's Concept of Class and the Athenian Polis

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Abstract: *Classical Athens is too often seen in an idealized form, as the paradigm of democracy. At the same time, the existence of slavery leads others to dismiss the direct and participatory nature of the polis. The social structure of Classical Athens has been hugely controversial for historians and sociologists. This article discusses this debate in the context of Marx's concept of class. Against the dominant Weberian notions of status and order, I argue that the Classical Marxist conception of class is a deeper analytical tool that enhances an understanding of the contradictions of Athenian society. The most significant contribution to the debate from this perspective is G.E.M de Ste. Croix's *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World*. Much of the scholarship in regard to Marx and the sociology of the ancient world followed the publication of this book, thus my discussion is heavily focused on this text. First, I outline class in Marx's theory of historical change. This involves an elaboration of key aspects of Marx's sociological tools, most significantly, the definition of 'mode of production'. Here I highlight the importance of the extraction of surplus value in defining social forms and discuss the birth of democracy in Athens. Second, I take up the arguments made about the ancient economy by the Weberian M.I Finley. I contend that his theoretical position misinterprets key aspects of 'class-consciousness' and from here too easily dismisses Marx's insights. My analysis of these debates stresses the value of a Marxist conception of class as a means to clarify the structure of Athenian society.*

Keywords: *Athens, democracy, class, slavery, Marx, Marxism, Weber, class consciousness, polis, de Ste.Croix, Finley.*

Introduction

The social structure of Classical Athens has endured as a highly controversial issue for historians and social theorists alike. One of the framing features of these debates has been the tendency to either focus too myopically on the limitations of Athenian society at the expense of a broader analysis or to elevate the virtues of Athenian society at the expense of any understanding of its limitations and broader character.¹ In short: the

¹ The limitations of the democratic polis are significant: citizenship was denied to women, foreigners and slaves. For example, Paul Lafargue, *The Right To Be Lazy*, (London: Charles Kerr and Co., Co-

analysis has been largely one-sided. This paper argues that Classical Marxism offers a way to overcome these reductions, without the need to either dismiss or accept the 'Athenian legacy'. Approaching the question with a sense of the contradictions inherent within the Athenian polis allows for both an appreciation of the elevated and ennobling role the ancient Greeks gave to politics and citizenship, but at the same time remaining critical of the basis that the society had in chattel slavery. When applied to the polis, a Marxist analysis gives clarity to the dynamics of Athenian society.

To make sense of this approach, I draw on a *specifically* Marxian definition of class.² This requires an explanation of the nature of production. 'Production' is not analogous with 'the economy' but is the broader character of social relations that exists within the total organization of society. The shape of political and state structures must be seen in close reference to the manner and nature of production. This is not to suggest any automatic base/superstructure causation but instead to underline a mode of analysis that looks to understand social forms as a totality. This means stressing that social phenomena have an integral relation to production, and are so interwoven that a method of abstraction is necessary to show the way in which the political and the economic form each other. With this in mind, an analysis of production underscores the role and place of politics within the greater organization of society. The contention of this article is that the form of production in the Ancient Greek polis provides an important, but overlooked, method to assess the merits of the ancient polis.

The nature of the Greek polis has been a constant source of inquiry for political theorists. Regrettably, the current mainstream of classical history and theory has relatively little interest in Marx. The failure of theorists to adequately address Marx exposes a significant weakness of such interpretations. This is especially evident when attempting to meaningfully analyze slavery and production in general, as I argue below. On a higher level it exposes a lacuna in Classical Studies neglect to seriously engage with social theory.

Moreover, in analysis of the ancient economy, the terrain has been largely defined by the debate between the 'modernists' and the 'primitivists'. Where the modernists take the position that the economy of antiquity is more or less the same as today with commodity exchange, currency etc., the primitivists, most notably M.I Finley, argue that modern notions of economics are highly problematic when applied to the ancient world because of the absence of a market economy.³ The theoretical advance of Finley's work (first outlined in *The Ancient Economy* published in 1973) was significant; by disproving the conventional assumption that the ancient economy was in most ways similar to a

operative, 1883), accessed <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lafargue/1883/lazy/>; Alfred Zimmern, *The Greek Commonwealth*, 5th Ed, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1931).

² The definition of 'class' is highly controversial both for and between Marxists and non-Marxist sociologists. See for example, Giovanni Arrighi et al, "Rethinking the Concepts of Class and Status-Group in a World-Systems Perspective" in *Anti-Systemic Movements*, (London: Verso, 1989): 3-28.

³ Ian Morris, "The Athenian Economy: Twenty Years after the Ancient Economy". *Classical Philology*, Vol. 89, No. 4 (1994): 351-4; Scott Meikle, *Aristotle's Economic Thought*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 2, 147-80. For the modernist perspective, see for example Edward E. Cohen, *Athenian Economy and Society: A Banking Perspective*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). For detail regarding the 'modernist' and 'primitivist' debate, see Scott Meikle "Modernism, Economics, and the Ancient Economy", *The Cambridge Classical Journal*, Vol. 41 (1996): 174-191.

modern capitalist one, Finley made the astute point that the ancient economy was not driven by commodity manufacture but actually based on agricultural production. Consequently, Finley concludes that class (in Marx's sense) does not exist. In this way, rather than overcoming the problems of the 'ancient economy' Finley replaced the current static orthodoxy with one of his own based on his reading of Weber. The prevalence of Finley's Weberian approach to the classical world is by far the most influential in regard to the economic debate and has continued to be the main form of analysis used by classical theorists when attempting to deal with sociological questions. However, the weakness of Finley's theoretical standpoint is evident when teased out. The distrust of, and failure to use, the key concept of class in the historical study of Athens is the focus of this article.

CLASS IN MARX'S THEORY OF HISTORY

Until recently, few historians of Antiquity seriously considered class with reference to Marx.⁴ There is an assumption in academic Classical Studies that the sociological tools associated with Marxist history writing are anachronistic; specifically, the use of categories that only came with the theorizing of the development of capitalist society are inapplicable to pre-modern forms of the economy. Apparently, Marx "never really devoted himself to the problem of class relations in pre-capitalist societies".⁵ According to this view, Marx is only useful as a critic of modern capitalist society. Class was deemed inapplicable in pre-capitalist society if there was no large industrial proletariat. This was combined with a drastic lack of interest – a 'silence' – in the question of class.⁶ But this silence, willing or not, was challenged in decisive terms with G.E.M de Ste. Croix's *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World*.⁷ This work provides a powerful statement on how the Marxist method should be used to interpret the classical world and redefined the terrain regarding Marx and the ancients.⁸ Following this publication, unprecedented contributions to classical history and political theory for the first time earnestly considered historical materialism. One of the remarkable aspects of Ste. Croix's *Class Struggle* is its methodological rigor. Not simply content in mapping out a history of Ancient Greece, Ste. Croix sets out to probe the real driving structures of the ancient world as a historical epoch. By seeing society as a totality, Ste. Croix explains

⁴ Ancient historians seemed to lag behind other periods, for example social historians like E.P. Thompson, Christopher Hill and Eric Hobsbawm significantly challenged this conservative view of social history in the 1960s and 1970s.

⁵ M.I. Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 2nd Ed., (London: Hogarth Press, 1985), 184. Hereafter *AE*.

⁶ Ste. Croix, "Karl Marx and The History of Classical Antiquity", *Arethusa*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1975): 7-8.

⁷ G.E.M de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981). Hereafter, *CSAGW*. The book has received sound endorsement – to take two examples, "one of the most strenuously theoretical works of history ever to have been produced in this country", Perry Anderson, "Class Struggle in The Ancient World", *History Workshop*, No. 16 (1983): 58; "must be numbered among the greatest works of twentieth-century Marxist historiography", Paul Blackledge, *Reflections on the Marxist Theory of History*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 104.

⁸ One notable issue in Ste. Croix's otherwise well-considered approach is his claim that women possibly formed a distinct class in classical society, *CSAGW*, 98-111. This problem stems from his dissolving of "'production' into 'reproduction', for a brief discussion see Anderson, *History Workshop*, 65.

why the forms of society change and why class relations force this change. The basis of this argument is in the operation of class and the subsequent form of surplus extraction from the exploited classes. Ste. Croix's polemics against other academics are notorious and this article seeks to define the debates in context of the polis.⁹

Ste. Croix begins his theoretical account of the ancient world with a defense of Marx's use of class and provides a detailed discussion to support this view. Class, according to Ste. Croix, "is the collective social expression of the fact of exploitation, the way in which exploitation is embodied in a social structure". Exploitation necessarily involves the extraction and preservation of a surplus by a dominant class: "the appropriation of a part of the product of the labour of others".¹⁰ This meant that "the main determinant of an individual's class position in Antiquity is the extent to which he exploits the labour of others (mainly unfree) or is himself exploited".¹¹ Fundamentally, class is defined by the relations people have to the overall form of production, namely the degree to which they control the conditions of their production, and hence the degree to which they can relate to one another in the context of the relations of production. The social relation that forms the basis of Athenian society is the exploitation of unfree labour by a free, slave-owning, minority who exploited the surplus, the means of production and the labourers. Therefore as an empirical category, class exists in Athens just as it exists in any society where there is a division between those who produce and those who control the productive apparatus. Class is a *relationship* and a *process*. Thus the most important class antagonism in Antiquity was between the slave owners and slaves; that is, an antagonism between those who owned sufficient property (in the means of production – large agriculture), and those who did not and upon whose forced (slave) labour rested – the power and wealth of the owning class.¹²

Marx sees class, as Ste. Croix outlines, not simply as a matter of consciousness but instead as an objective relationship that "people have to the means and labour of production and to each other".¹³ This is fundamental to historical materialism, as Georg Lukács maintains: "In Marxism the division of society into classes is determined by position within the process of production".¹⁴ Various social phenomena can disguise class divisions, such as status, order, religion, the law etc., but what is really fundamental is the ability of historical materialism to make sense of these ideas in

⁹ Josiah Ober, "A Judicious Study of Discernible Reality", *Polis*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (2005): 1-3. For example, Ste. Croix's damning of the French intellectuals that have attempted, wrongly as he sees it, to use Marx. He cites J.P Vernant and Charles Parain and points out the deficiencies in their reading of class. "Where Parain or Vernant would allow Greek slaves to count as a class at all in Marx's sense is not clear to me." *CSAGW*, 63-4.

¹⁰ *CSAGW*, 43.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 270.

¹² *Ibid.*, 115. Ste. Croix discusses the other forms of labour at length, regrettably there is not sufficient space here for such discussion, see *CSAGW*, 205-278.

¹³ *CSAGW*, 32.

¹⁴ Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, Trans. Rodney Livingstone, (London: Merlin Press, 1971), 46. Hereafter *H&CC*.

relation to society as a whole.¹⁵ This type of analysis takes the objective realities of society and analyses them concretely in terms of *class*.

The Marxist method rests upon the material conditions of society, as they change and evolve. The total form of society, which is always in movement, decisively shifts as friction between the forces and relations of production intensifies and each comes into contradiction with the other. Each historical social form is differentiated by the precise way surplus labour is extracted. As Marx put it:

*Thus the social relations within which individuals produce, the social relations of production, change, are transformed, with the change and development of the material means of production, the productive forces, the relations of production in their totality constitute what are called the social relations, society, and, specifically, a society at a definite stage of historical development, a society with a peculiar, distinctive character. Ancient society, feudal society, bourgeois society are such totalities of production relations, each of which at the same time denotes a special stage of development in the history of mankind.*¹⁶

Analysis of the social relations and forces of production, *the mode of production*, provides “the framework from within which the class struggle, politics, ideology, etc., of that social formation can be explained”.¹⁷ However, the relationship between social, political and ideological institutions and the ‘economic basis’ of a society are far from automatically determined.¹⁸ Marx and Engels themselves never imagined that the economic relations as such constituted the whole, nor even the sole determining cause, of any society. Engels made this very clear, insisting upon the complex nature of historical causation crucial to historical materialism as a mode of analysis:

According to the materialist view of history, the determining factor in history is, *in the final analysis*, the production and reproduction of actual life. More than that was never maintained either by Marx or myself. Now if someone distorts this by declaring the economic moment to be the *only* determining factor, he changes that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, ridiculous piece of jargon.¹⁹

The core of Marx's method, *mode of production analysis*, understands history as a changing process, a dynamic variation. It is *production*, not the economy which lies at the center of this process. ‘Economy’ unlike ‘production’ is static, referring merely to the existence of economic functioning – supply and demand, scarcity, price, etc. Conversely, Marx looks at “human working activity, not from the standpoint of its technical methods and instruments of labour, but from the standpoint of its social form.

¹⁵ These factors of course interrelate with the position of class, but do not intrinsically define the relationship, although they can certainly help shape it. See Lukács, *H&CC*, 50.

¹⁶ Marx, *Wage, Labour and Capital*, in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's Collected Works*, Vol. 9. (Lawrence and Wishart: London, 1975ff) (Hereafter, *MECW*), 212; see also *Poverty of Philosophy*, *MECW* 6, 165-6.

¹⁷ Blackledge, *Reflections on the Marxist Theory of History*, 28.

¹⁸ See for example Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Holy Family*, *MECW* 4, 93.

¹⁹ Engels to Joseph Bloch, 22 September 1890, *MECW* 49, 33-4.

It deals with *production relations* that are established among people in the process of production”.²⁰ The ‘mode of production’ refers to the entire social organism as it exists, including both relations of labour and the form (or forms) of surplus extraction, and it is the precise form of surplus extraction which provides the key to understanding these processes.²¹ Ste. Croix outlines the importance of the category of surplus extraction throughout his book, stating: “the really distinctive feature of each society is not the way in which the bulk of the labour of production is done, but how the extraction of the surplus from the immediate producer is secured”.²² Marx supports such a notion: “The specific economic form in which unpaid surplus labour is pumped out of the direct producers...reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis for the entire social structure”.²³

Ste. Croix establishes that the ‘innermost secret’ of unpaid surplus labour in Antiquity arises from the ownership of large agricultural properties and the silver mines that the ruling classes relied upon.²⁴ Although revenue came in the form of taxes, public utilities, the empire and trade, the ruling surplus was generated by the use of unfree labour on the large agricultural properties.²⁵ What systematically makes Athens a slave society, or a ‘slave mode of production’, is not which class does the majority of labour but that the propertied classes extract most of their primary surplus from “the working population by means of unfree labour”.²⁶ So here we would agree with Perry Anderson’s characterization that the Greeks transformed slavery “from an ancillary facility into a systematic mode of production”.²⁷ Moreover, it has been well established that the *majority* of labour carried out in Athens was carried out not by slaves, as traditionally thought. Instead, the overwhelming *bulk of production* was performed by free peasants who utilized little or no labour outside their own families and contributed little to the overall surplus.²⁸ But, crucially, slavery was always present and provided the fact for surplus extraction.²⁹ This analysis of class proves the basis to explain the nature of the Greek polis in terms of the forces acting upon it and pushing it forward – as an arena of class struggle. Therefore, while Athenian democracy acted as a bulwark for the lower classes against the propertied class, to maintain or sustain their ruling class position, those at the top were reliant on raising the rate of exploitation of the slaves. “We need not be surprised, then”, Ste. Croix writes;

²⁰ I.I. Rubin, *Essays on Marx’s Theory of Value*, Trans. Miloš Samardžija and Fredy Perlman, (Québec: Black Rose Books, 1973), 31.

²¹ See Scott Meikle’s review of CSAGW, “Marxism and the Necessity of Essentialism”. *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory*. Vol. 16, No. 2 (1988): 156-62. Meikle is overly cautious of the usage of the term ‘mode of production’ but absolutely right to emphasise the importance of the mode of surplus extraction.

²² CSAGW, 51.

²³ Karl Marx, *Capital Vol. III*, (London: Pelican, 1981), 927; quoted Ste. Croix, CSAGW, 51.

²⁴ CSAGW, 65-8.

²⁵ Marx had observed correctly, that the “the history of classical antiquity is the history of cities, but of cities founded on landed property and on agriculture”, *Grundrisse* (M.N), 479. For a brief but useful discussion on trade see Antony Andrews, *Greek Society*, (London: Penguin, 1971), 130-147.

²⁶ CSAGW, 133.

²⁷ Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*, (London: NLB, 1974), 21.

²⁸ A.H.M. Jones, *Athenian Democracy*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), 18; Ste. Croix, *Arethusa*, 16.

²⁹ CSAGW 112-6; Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* in *MECW* 28, 400-4.

[I]f we find a more intense development of slavery at Athens than at most other places in the Greek world: if the humbler citizens could not be fully exploited, and it was inexpedient to try to put too much pressure on the metics, then it was necessary to rely to an exceptional degree on exploiting the labour of the slaves.³⁰

This position offers the content of the dialectical relationship between democracy and slavery. This historical fact has necessitated a change in the way that the polis is evaluated by raising the issue of the central contradiction of the freedom of the Athenian citizen.

The Athenian Constitution, in its fullest form, came into being by political revolution. In 507/8, after intense fighting between sections of the ruling class, the *demos* were able to establish the constitutional reforms that wrestled political power into the hands of the citizenry.³¹ It is clear that the *demos* were instrumental in creating the actual changes and institutions of democracy.³² Constitutionally, the Assembly was the backbone of the polis. Consisting of every Athenian citizen, meeting around once a week, it had a quorum of 6,000 and an incredible power over the fine details of policy.³³ The right to participate and speak in the Assembly was universal to citizens and provided the context for debate all over Athens. The law courts (with no entrenched judges) and the public offices (some offices could only be held once during a lifetime) were chosen by lot and provided every citizen the (potential) practice of government, also encouraged by public pay.³⁴ The ethos of the democracy reflected this feature, as the Xenophonian-Pseudo *Constitution of Athenians* upheld:

[A]t Athens the poor and the commons seem justly to have the advantage over the well-born and the wealthy; for it is the commons which mans the fleet and has brought the state her power, and the steersmen and the boatswains and the ship-masters and the lookout-men and the ship-builders these have brought the state her power much rather than the infantry and the well-born and the good citizens. This being so it seems just that all should have a share in offices filled by lot or by election, and that any citizen who wishes should be allowed to speak.³⁵

³⁰ CSAGW, 141.

³¹ Of particular interest is Josiah Ober's account which provides relatively unexplored interpretation by a non-Marxist. See *The Athenian Revolution: Essays on Ancient Greek Democracy and Political Theory*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 32-52.

³² This is not the place for a discussion on the merit and nature of the Constitution. The best short account on this topic remains Jones, *Athenian Democracy*.

³³ The administrative functions were carried out by the Council of 500 consisting of an annual rotation of citizens; the Council prepared the agenda for the Assembly and met 200 times a year. However, on controversial issues the Council put the question to the Assembly and any citizen could draft a motion. Any citizen could say what they pleased and offer amendments to that motion. The Presidents of the Council and of the Assembly were chosen by lot daily.

³⁴ The ten generalships were, however elected by the Assembly. The Athenians tended to view election as an aristocratic principle, since voters would tend to go for a known rather than an unknown name – and this is reflected in the class background of the generals – often from very wealthy families. However, the Assembly had direct power over direction of the generals and had renegade generals punished.

³⁵ Old Oligarch, *Constitution of Athenians* 1.2, Trans. James A. Petch, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1926), 15.

While it is more than apparent that the actual workings of the democracy had substantial shortcomings, the type of politicisation that was embedded in citizen life was essential to how the Athenians themselves made sense of their government.³⁶

Clearly Athens was not a democracy simply for the slave owners, but instead can be seen as a relentless *struggle* between the active citizenry and the propertied class that ever aimed to wind back the power of the citizens. This can easily be seen in the operation of the democratic institutions of the polis that aimed to curb the power of the aristocrats – such as election by lot, public pay and mass participatory forms of government – and in so doing to actively control the state.³⁷ This class struggle on the political plane represented real achievements. The extraordinary nature of the Athenian polis represented a real political existence that needs no justification, simply explanation.

ORDER, STATUS AND CLASS

Ste. Croix mounts a strong case that class is the fundamental tool for analysis because unlike other sociological tools, class offers pivotal elucidation, and not mere description. Ste. Croix's main stalking horse here is, of course, Finley. The Weberian position, as advanced by Finley, sees classical society in terms of a 'status based model', categorizing societal divisions between rich and poor by 'status and order' – as put on a 'spectrum'.³⁸ Finley describes these terms himself as "admirably vague" with a "considerable psychological element".³⁹ What "determines a man's place on the spectrum" is his or her access to "rights, privileges claims and duties" and "he may have certain civil rights but no political rights...the combination of these rights or lack of them" is where he would sit on the status spectrum.⁴⁰ Finley then adds, "invariably what are conventionally called 'class struggles' in antiquity prove to be conflicts between groups at different points in the spectrum disputing the distribution of specific rights and privileges".⁴¹ But as Ste. Croix makes clear, "Status is a purely descriptive category with no heuristic capacity, no such explanatory power as the dynamic Marxist concept of class provides".⁴² Where a class analysis exposes the real, underlying relations that shape society, 'status' categorizes individuals on the basis of superficial 'rights and privileges'. 'Status' is a partial acknowledgement that in class society, legal and political forms can obscure social relations. However, instead of looking to a class analysis and beyond to the historical importance of the modern proletariat, Finley merely accepts this contradictory status analysis.

³⁶ See for example the very famous Funeral Oration by Pericles. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Book 2.34-46, trans. Rex Warner, (Middlesex: Penguin, 1954), 143-151.

³⁷ CSAGW, 287.

³⁸ AE, 61.

³⁹ Ibid., 51.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 67-8.

⁴¹ Ibid., 68.

⁴² CSAGW, 93.

Finley looks *superficially* at class in Marx's sense but is quick to discard it, exhibiting his lack of understanding rather than the inapplicability of class as a tool.⁴³ He seems to think that because an industrial working class didn't exist, class did not exist in the ancient world and that the efforts of historians to apply class in Marx's sense are wrong footed. Finley bases his refutation of class on an internal criticism of Marxist theory to prove that "neither in a Marxist nor a non-Marxist standpoint is class a sufficiently demarcated category".⁴⁴ He does this by reference to the "most-orthodox Marxist" Georg Lukács and his discussion of class-consciousness in pre-capitalist society.⁴⁵ Finley quotes Lukács remarkably selectively, "status-consciousness masks class-consciousness", and so "the structuring of society into castes and estates means that economic elements are *inextricably* joined to political and religious factors" and "economic and legal categories are objectively and *substantively so interwoven as to be inseparable*".⁴⁶ This argument is particularly revealing.⁴⁷ Lukács is *always* clear that class *objectively* exists in pre-capitalist societies. What he is theoretically mapping out is the ability of historical classes (the proletariat is his focus) to become conscious. At no point is Lukács arguing that classes in pre-capitalist societies were conscious, basing *his entire argument on that very fact* as he explicitly states (a sentence after the final quotation Finley cites) there is "no possible position within such a society from which the economic basis of all social relations could be made conscious".⁴⁸ The ancient economy, as Finley is well aware, is quantifiably more primitive than a modern economy. The structure of pre-capitalist societies, which subsumed and melded political, legal and economic rights, did generally provide social expression in 'status' and 'order'. Thus taken from a subjective 'status' viewpoint, Finley sees class *as* class-consciousness and not as Marxists do: as an objective social relation to production. In an attempt to answer for the absence of a self-conscious class in pre-capitalist society, Finley falls into contradiction and ahistoricism. On one hand, he is trying to offer a methodological explanation for the functioning of ancient society. On the other hand, Finley is unable to come to terms with the function of class as a dynamic category. Finley's swift and simplistic denial of the existence of class exhibits his lack of understanding of the concept, while failing to actually undermine class as an applicable tool of analysis.

However, Lukács makes the distinction between 'status' and class in relation to their *historically* changing forms. This point is made explicitly: "in accordance with the looser economic structures of society, the political and legal institutions (the division into estates, privileges, etc.) have different functions objectively and subjectively from those

⁴³ As he discards exploitation and imperialism— "too broad as categories of analysis", *AE*, 157.

⁴⁴ *AE*, 50.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, (London: Merlin, 1971), 55-9 (original emphasis. Hereafter, *H&CC*.) quoted Finley, *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Ironically Lukács studied closely with Weber. He had been associated with Weber's 'Heidelberg Circle' from 1912 to 1919 and was particularly indebted to some aspects of Weber's sociological work, see Michael Löwy, *Georg Lukács: From Romanticism to Bolshevism*, Trans. Patrick Camiller, (London: NLB, 1979), 37-42; István Mészáros, *Lukács' Concept of Dialectic*, (London: Merlin, 1972), 21, 121.

⁴⁸ *H&CC*, 57.

exercised under capitalism”.⁴⁹ Crucially, Lukács maps out the historical difference between class existing throughout history – now hidden, now open – and as a class *for itself* (i.e. a class with self-consciousness which can only be achieved with the stark contradictions of capitalism).⁵⁰ Lukács surmises that “the economy has not objectively reached the stage of being for itself,” thereby affirming that the stage of economic growth cannot make conscious the totality of social relations.⁵¹ Class-consciousness is the unity of the subjective and objective realities of social production; the *conscious* realisation of the form in which a minority extract a surplus from the producing classes. Since capitalism universalises the form that surplus labour is exploited by turning it into a commodity, it is only the working class – by virtue of their place in social production – that is able to understand the totality of social relations and act upon this contradiction.⁵²

Without the theoretical sophistication of a historical analysis to distinguish and relate structural to superstructural phenomena, Finley has no alternative but to dispense with the crucial category of class altogether. As Lukács notes, in pre-capitalist periods, “the classes could only be deduced from the immediately given historical reality *by the methods of historical materialism*”.⁵³ Finley’s approach fails on his own terms. By doing nothing more than pointing out a fact of pre-capitalist, imputed-consciousness, Finley shows that Marxists can provide an explanation for status as a historical phenomenon, whereas Weberians *cannot*, by their own account, provide any meaningful account of class.

For this reason, Finley objects to Marxist classification of slaves as a distinct class, “in particular, neither slaves were as such members of a single class nor were slave owners”.⁵⁴ He argues that the role of slavery in production “varied too greatly” to be seen as a class relation. However, there is deep inconsistency within Finley’s historical evidence and his conclusions. In *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* he is in full agreement with Ste. Croix on the factual and fundamental aspects of production:

[F]ree men dominated small-scale farming, much of it subsistence farming, as well as petty commodity production and small-scale trading in the cities; slaves dominated, and virtually monopolized, large-scale production in both the countryside and the urban sector. It follows that slaves provided the bulk of the immediate income from property of the elites, economic, social and political.⁵⁵

This is the same position as Ste. Croix, so how does Finley come to a theoretical conclusion at such odds with Ste. Croix? Finley has the right starting point: the ancient economy was not dominated by commodity manufacture, but production was based on

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ As Marx maintains, “this mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself”, *Poverty of Philosophy*, MECW 6, 483, 211.

⁵¹ H&CC, 57.

⁵² See Ibid. 59-81; Maurice Dobb, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1946), 7.

⁵³ Ibid., 58.

⁵⁴ AE, 184.

⁵⁵ M. I Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology*, (Middlesex: Penguin, 1980), 82.

agriculture, where slaves provided the surplus. Where Finley errs is his interpretation of the process of production. Finley sees it as “essential” to “lay the ghost once and for all of the slave mode of production”, due to both the ‘scale’ of the free productive labour in Antiquity and because “chattel slavery has in the past been integrated into other modes of production, most obviously capitalism.”⁵⁶ Both arguments miss the point rather drastically. Firstly, what characterizes a mode of production is not related to the overall scale, but instead what class (“*slaves provided the bulk of the immediate income from property*”, to use the language of his passage above) produces the surplus for the ruling class. This is what determines the mode of production. Secondly, at any one time in a mode of production there can be a great variance of types of labour performed; what characterizes the form is the forces and relations of production.

The applicability of the ‘slave mode of production’ has not only been questioned by those openly hostile to Marxism. Political Marxist Ellen Meiksins Wood has argued vehemently against the ‘slave mode of production’.⁵⁷ Her book *Peasant-Citizen and Slave* is a response to the Classical Marxist position that ancient surplus production rested upon slave labour.⁵⁸ According to Wood, Marxists have replicated the anti-democratic rhetoric of those claiming that the ordinary Athenian citizen did not work, or what she calls the ‘myth of the idle mob’. While Wood does provide an interesting line of development for the bourgeois origins of the ‘myth of the idle mob’, her argument that Marxist analysis has simply ‘inverted’ the myth is dubious.⁵⁹ Wood contends, “[p]aradoxically, though the myth of the idle mob originated in a conservative reaction to democracy, it has lived on in the Marxist conception of the ‘slave mode of production’”. Wood mounts her position against Engels, Anderson and Ste. Croix and draws most heavily from Finley.⁶⁰ Considerable time is spent refuting Ste. Croix, who she argues “leaves the critical questions unanswered, and unasked”.⁶¹ At the heart of the disagreement is what role slaves played in surplus production. Wood disagrees that slaves played the crucial (or significant) role in agriculture, and instead sees slave labour as mainly confined to the household and the silver mines.⁶² Wood disputes Ste. Croix’s evidence for the bulk of surplus labour being performed by slaves, but provides no solid case for where slave labour fitted into the production of surplus value.⁶³ The closest she gets to this issue is where she writes, “[t]he large numbers [of slaves] in the mines and in domestic service were certainly ‘essential’ to the Athenian economy, and their

⁵⁶ *AE*, 179. Oddly enough in Finley’s review of Anderson’s *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* which appeared in *The Guardian* (Feb 6, 1975), he doesn’t dispute the “slave mode of production”.

⁵⁷ As for her relationship with Marxism, see Neil Davidson, “Is There Anything to Defend in Political Marxism”, *International Socialist Review*, 91 (2013-4): accessed <http://isreview.org/issue/91/there-anything-defend-political-marxism>.

⁵⁸ Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Peasant-Citizen and Slave: The Foundations of Athenian Democracy*, (London: Verso, 1988), 10.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 5-42.

⁶⁰ Alex Callinicos notes the irony of Wood’s use of Finley in opposition to Ste. Croix, even when Finley and Ste. Croix are in agreement, “The Foundations of Athenian Democracy”, *International Socialism*, 40 (1988): 128.

⁶¹ Wood, *Peasant-Citizen and Slave*, 65, 78.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 40-1. Wood believes Ste. Croix “does little more than prove slaves existed, especially on large estates”, 67.

⁶³ Ste. Croix’s theoretical case, see *CSAGW*, 226-32.

absence, if such a thing can be imagined, would have transformed Athenian society”.⁶⁴ This sentence hints at the general issues of clarity in Wood’s argument. She finds herself stuck between the antinomy of defending the peasant-citizen and attempting to make sense of the role of slavery in production. Since her argument relies on downplaying the latter, by both denying its importance in agriculture and its role in supplying a productive surplus, the material foundations of the Athenian economy are easily lost. There are reasons for this. Wood is at pains to reinforce her general thesis of a ‘peasant culture’.⁶⁵ Wood suggests “many of the most cherished ideals of Athenian culture, and even some of the exalted notions of Greek philosophy, may owe their origins to experience and aspirations of the Attic peasantry”.⁶⁶ While this is a controversial claim in itself, the implications of her construction add a problematic gloss to the material basis of the Ancient polis.⁶⁷ Further, Wood quotes Eric Wolf dreaming about a peasant utopia, where the free villager reigned supreme, unhampered by large landowners or tax collectors. Wood does state that this “of course, never existed”, but then goes on to say, “the peasant-citizen came as close as any peasant ever has to the freedom described by Wolf, and the deme as close as any peasant community ever has to the ideal of the ‘free village’”.⁶⁸

Since Wood’s case is entirely dependent on the independence of the peasant-citizen, there is a danger in slipping into one-sided formulations on what the nature of this freedom represents. This problem can be found in her earlier (co-authored with Neal Wood), *Class Ideology and Ancient Political Theory*, where they write, “[i]t is perhaps not excessive to say that the laboring citizenry of Athens came as close to being free and independent laborers as is possible where a class of laborers exists at all – more independent, of course, than the free proletariat of the modern age”.⁶⁹ However, this type of statement opens itself up to claims of ahistoricism. Wood sees freedom resting purely in the relative absence of economic exploitation. In taking such a position she removes the dynamic agency of class as a historical factor. Conversely, to see the relationship dialectically, the proletariat is at once the most unfree *and* free of any historical class. It is unfree because capitalism involves direct exploitation, forcing people into lives they cannot control and making them dependent on selling their labour-power and making their own existence alienated. For Marx, modern capitalism places humankind in chains. But at the same time the proletariat has freedom because the social order is dependent on their labour-power. This provides the potential to

⁶⁴ Wood, *Peasant-Citizen and Slave*, 79.

⁶⁵ Wood, *Peasant-Citizen and Slave*, 82.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁶⁷ Conversely, Ste. Croix writes, “These men [slave owning class], liberated from toil, are the people who produced virtually all Greek art and literature and science and philosophy, and provided a good proportion of the armies which won remarkable victories...In a very real sense most of them were parasitic upon other men, their slaves above all; most of them were not supports of the democracy...which was its great contribution to political progress, although they did supply almost all itself leaders”, *CSAGW*, 115.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 126-7.

⁶⁹ Ellen Meiksins Wood and Neal Wood, *Class Ideology and Ancient Political Theory: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle in Social Context*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), 36. Wood makes similar claims in *Citizens to Lords: A Social History of Western Political Thought From Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, (London, Verso, 2008).

displace the entire apparatus. As Alasdair MacIntyre puts it, “this fact, that the working class has only the alternative of continuing capitalism or of ending class society for good, is one that marks off the struggle of the working class from all previous class struggle”.⁷⁰

Further still, on review, Marxists have been fairly unconvinced by Wood's arguments. Scott Meikle sums up Wood's thesis as “allowing herself to slide into the opposite propaganda and a position with a piece of social-democratic sentimentality: Athenian peasants were hard-working types with a good labourist culture, took pride in their work and hardly employed slaves at all”.⁷¹ While most Marxists have recognized the merit of Wood's originality, the comparison between her book and Ste. Croix's has been the obvious focal point.⁷²

Conversely, Non-Marxists have been more sympathetic to Wood's case. Josiah Ober, to take the most notable example, agrees with Wood's ‘revisionist-Marxism’ approach which he regards as having opened up ‘interpretative possibilities’ closed by the perceived narrow positioning of Marxism. Like Wood, Ober “rejects the notion that Athenian democracy was fundamentally dependent upon slave labour”.⁷³ Ober bases his own analysis not on class or status, but on the ideas of ‘mass’ and ‘elite’ because “neither Finley nor Ste. Croix succeeded in fully explaining the operational significance of the relations between ordinary and elite citizens”.⁷⁴ However, overall, Ober's work generally accepts Finley's outlook, while shifting the emphasis onto the question of how the divide between the rich and poor played out on a political level in Athens. His contributions are certainly interesting pieces of history, as are Finley's, but ultimately Ober's analysis, by staying at the level of political phenomena, fails to probe more deeply into the driving forces and structure of ancient Athenian society.⁷⁵

The importance of materialist analysis is reinforced by consideration of the work of Hannah Arendt. With little correlation to the basis of material production, Arendt constructs a politics that elevates Athens to an unreal position. In Arendt's view, the Athenians were able to achieve the true active life because of the exclusion of the laboring masses, “Not only in Athens but throughout antiquity and up to the modern

⁷⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, “What is Marxist Theory For?” in *Alasdair MacIntyre's Engagement with Marxism*, Ed. Paul Blackledge and Neil Davidson, (Chicago: Haymarket, 2009), 98.

See also Engels, “Draft of a Communist Confession of Faith”, *MECW* 6, 100.

⁷¹ Scott Meikle, “Ordinary Athenians, ‘Peasant-Citizen and Slave: The Foundations of Athenian Democracy’ Ellen Meiksins Wood”, *The Classical Review*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (1989), 278.

⁷² Callinicos, “The Foundations of Athenian Democracy”, 126; Meikle, “Ordinary Athenians”, 278-9; David Konstan, “Before Post-Marxism: Ellen Meiksins Wood on Modern Theory and Ancient Society”, *Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture and Society*, Vol. 4, No.4 (1991): 113-118; Chris Harman, *A People's History of the World*, (London: Bookmarks, 1999), 626n39; Blackledge, *Reflections on the Marxist Theory of History*, 104-10; Brian S. Roper, *The History of Democracy: A Marxist Interpretation*, (London: Pluto, 2012), 32.

⁷³ Josiah Ober, *The Athenian Revolution: Essays on Ancient Greek Democracy and Political Theory*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 124. Ober completely misunderstands Ste. Croix's argument. He seems to think that Ste. Croix is suggesting the peasant farmer utilized slave labour to provide the bulk of the productive labour, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 26-7.

⁷⁴ Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens*, 12-3.

⁷⁵ This flaw is again apparent in Ober's more recent work, see *The Rise and Fall of Classical Greece*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

age, those who labored were not citizens and those who were citizens were first of all those who did not labor or who possessed more than their labor power".⁷⁶ Not only is this factually incorrect, but the political conclusion is that those who labour are not capable of ruling – even in her idealized way. This is generally reflected in Arendt's compartmentalization of 'labour', 'work' and 'action'. Class is represented as removed from relations in production and in Marx's sense a decisively nineteenth century phrase. Since Arendt is keen to strongly respond to Marx, there is certainly some irony in her (sometimes) explicit rejection of Marx's insights, like the declaration that the "value of this hypothesis for the historical sciences is small indeed".⁷⁷ Arendt's idealist rendering of Athens is a confirmation of the need for a materialist outlook to understand the realities of society.

CONCLUSION

The fierce debates regarding the nature of classical society and the functioning of the economy swiftly fizzled and died. After only a short few years of furor, the decline of any meaningful discussion is evident. There is no shortage of new material being written about Athens, yet there is a real shortage of new scholarship that adopts or engages with Marx in any meaningful way.⁷⁸ But by far 'status' has taken the prevalent place in academic interpretations of the social basis of the polis, whilst class is dismissed as posing too many 'recalcitrant obstacles'. The prominent classical historian Paul Cartledge contends that:

Since the root of their antagonism lay in differential ownership of the means of production, and the aim of their struggle was often the control of the organs of government, this looks very much like class struggle - except that the classes are defined not purely by economic but by a mixture of economic and legal criteria, and the solidarity of 'the poor' was less organic and more soluble than that of 'the rich'.⁷⁹

This formulation shares a very similar sentiment and dismissal of class to Finley's reference to Lukács.⁸⁰ It falls into the same mistake of misunderstanding class, and adopting the tenacious position that if a historical class cannot see themselves strictly

⁷⁶ Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, (London: Penguin, 1978), 19; Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 33-5.

⁷⁷ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, (London: Viking, 1965), 56-7.

⁷⁸ Such is the current predicament that Louise A. Hitchcock could treat Finley as if a hardened Marxist ("blacklisted as a communist", while perhaps forgetting Finley's knighthood), *Theory for Classics: A Student's Guide*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), 17-8. Ober, on the other hand, gives overly generous influence to Ste. Croix, see *Polis*, 3. However, one notable exception is Dimitris J. Kyrtatas, who continues to maintain Ste. Croix's form of analysis. For example, see his chapter, 'Slavery and Economy in the Greek World' in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery Volume 1: The Ancient Mediterranean World*, Ed. Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 91-111.

⁷⁹ Paul Cartledge, "Class Struggle" in *The Oxford Companion to Classical Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) accessed <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198601654.001.0001/acref-9780198601654-e-152>.

⁸⁰ See *Ibid.*, 15-17.

in class terms, class as category is faulty. This kind of aversion to class analysis is all too typical. To take the most recent example (although from Roman scholarship, the point remains fundamentally the same), Aldo Schiavone's 2013 book *Spartacus* dismisses class as a modern and incompatible term for Roman slaves due to the lack of class-consciousness.⁸¹ But as Paul D'Amato has pointed out in a review,

And yet, it is undeniable that a great portion of the wealth of Rome's ruling elite was derived, outside of direct plunder and taxation, from the labour of slaves. For Marx, classes were determined not only by their consciousness, but of their objective position in the production of society's surplus wealth. The slaves may not have been a class 'for themselves,' to use Marx's famous term — that is, a class capable of conscious organization in its own interests — but they certainly were a class 'in themselves,' that is, an exploited class whose labour was the foundation of Roman wealth.⁸²

In attempting to orientate through the cloud of mystery that covers the ancient polis, against the real errors of misinterpretation of the society itself, I have argued that the scholarship has vastly misunderstood Marx. Historical materialism sees understanding the productive basis of society as crucial to understanding social relations. What is really *essential* is how *the surplus is extracted*. The process of grasping the totality must always be aware of the reflection of the class structure of Athenian society, where a ruling class extracted its surplus from slave labour tied to large agricultural properties. For this reason, when the ruling class desired a rise in the rate of exploitation, it was the slaves that felt the turn of the screw. Instead, the citizen body exerted itself, in an extremely advanced existence, against the propertied class continuously. This illustrates the inherent contradictions of Athenian society.

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⁸¹ Aldo Schiavone, *Spartacus*, Trans. Jeremy Carden, (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2013), 98-103.

⁸² Paul D'Amato, "A New Perspective on Antiquity's Greatest Slave Rebel", *International Socialist Review*, 91 (2013-4) accessed <http://isreview.org/issue/91/new-perspective-antiquitys-greatest-slave-rebel>.

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Ned Kelly's Last Words: "Ah, Well, I Suppose"

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Abstract: *It has long been widely, even admiringly, held that Ned Kelly's last words before execution were "Such is life". This is a key part of a prevalent Kelly mythology that has been subject to little serious critique. Yet the attribution of the phrase 'Such is life' to Kelly is pure fiction. Analysis of the reportage of the day reveals Kelly's actual last words, and explains how they were transmuted by one journalist into the catchy expression quoted as fact by many historians. It shows that the image of Kelly standing tall and defiant, saying 'Such is life' as the rope was placed around his neck, is nothing but a highly romanticised myth. In fact, Kelly came to an ignominious, mumbling end on the scaffold, a far cry from popular legend.*

Keywords: *Ned Kelly, Edward Kelly, Kelly Gang, Ned Kelly facts, Ned Kelly bushranger, Ned Kelly museum, Old Melbourne Gaol, famous last words.*

It has long been widely, even admiringly, held that Ned Kelly's last words before execution were "Such is life".¹ To television producer, Paul Terry, "the fatalistic and courageous 'Such is life' has become synonymous with Ned and everything he stood for".² The claim has been relayed in Australian history texts and is commonly taught as fact to school children.³ In Peter Carey's Booker Prize-winning novel *True History of the*

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¹ E.g. Jerome J. Kenneally, *The Complete Inner History of the Kelly Gang* (2nd ed. Melbourne: Ruskin, 1929), 267; Graham Jones, *Ned Kelly: The Larrikin Years* (Wangaratta: Charquin Hill, 1990), 122; Gary Dean and Dagmar Balcarek, *Ned and the Others*, rev. ed. (Glenrowan: Glen Rowan Cobb & Co, 2014), 378; Peter FitzSimons, *Ned Kelly: The Story of Australia's Most Notorious Legend* (Sydney: Heinemann, 2013), 688.

² Paul Terry, *The True Story of Ned Kelly's Last Stand* (Crows Nest: Alan & Unwin, 2012), 251. Terry enthused ironically, "A towering figure such as Ned Kelly deserves a final statement and if he had not said these words, or something like them, we would have had to make them up."

³ E.g. "His [Kelly's] last words were said to be, 'Such is life'", Cathy Bedson et al., *Humanities Alive* (Milton: Wiley & Sons, second ed., 2010), 79; it also wrongly says that Kelly "had no defence lawyer" at his trial.

Kelly Gang, widely used in senior and tertiary literature courses, a fictional 'pamphlet' at the end of the story represents Kelly's last words as "Such is life".⁴

The phrase has been tattooed on enthusiasts' bodies and emblazoned on tee-shirts and car decals, often with an image of a pistol-toting Ned in armour. Interestingly, a post-mortem study has shown that males with Ned Kelly tattoos are nearly eight times more likely than the average corpse to have been murdered, and nearly three times more likely to have killed themselves.⁵ Yet despite its prevalence, the attribution of the phrase "Such is life" to Kelly is pure fiction. Analysis of the reportage of the day shows that the image of Kelly standing tall and defiant, saying "Such is life" as the rope was placed around his neck, is nothing but a highly romanticised myth. This article contributes to other recent questioning of Kelly mythology by tracking this specific instance through primary sources.⁶

Kelly was hanged at the Melbourne Gaol on Thursday, 11 November 1880, after nearly two years on the run. Behind him was more than a decade of crime, including stock theft, highway robbery, aggravated assault, destruction of property, public drunkenness, threats to kill, at least two shootings, multiple murders, corpse looting, bank robbery, hostage-taking, attempted train derailment and a planned passenger massacre.⁷ The hanging was a major news event, and "applications to witness the last struggles of Edward Kelly were so numerous, that the Chief Secretary was compelled to take the dispensing of them into his own hands. The admissions were virtually limited to the Victorian press and the recognised officials, the *Sydney Morning Herald* being the only outside journal permitted to be represented".⁸

The last words of famous (and infamous) people have always been sought for the record, and it was the usual practice in Victoria for the condemned to be asked on the scaffold if they had any final statement to make.⁹ Because of Kelly's notoriety, news reportage of the event was detailed.¹⁰ It typically summarised his last days, his transfer within the gaol to the condemned cell, his pinioning and short walk to the gallows, and

⁴ Peter Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang* (Sydney: Vintage, 2000), 474; his fictional pamphlet is a cut-down and partly reworded extract from the *Herald* of 11 November 1880, 2.

⁵ Roger Byard, "Ned Kelly tattoos - origins and forensic implications", *Journal of Forensic Legal Medicine*, 18.6 (August 2011): 276-9.

⁶ Alex Castles, *Ned Kelly's Last Days* (Crow's Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2005), 217, dismissed Kelly's claimed last words as "one of the most famous and potent inaccuracies of the Kelly myth", but gave no supporting analysis. For recent broad critiques of Kelly mythology see Ian MacFarlane, *Unmasking the Kelly Gang* (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2012), and Doug Morrissey, *Ned Kelly: A Lawless Life* (Ballarat: Connor Court, 2015), Appendix IV; cf. Stuart Dawson, "Redeeming Fitzpatrick: Ned Kelly and the Fitzpatrick Incident", *Eras Journal* 17.1 (2015), 60-91.

⁷ Kelly's criminal career is largely summarised in the *Argus*, 12 November 1880, 6. Of his killings it observed, "Although he was convicted of but one murder, he was guilty, according to his own admissions, of three; and to his action was due the deaths of no fewer than nine human beings".

⁸ *Launceston Examiner*, 15 November 1880, 3.

⁹ The record book *Particulars of Executions 1894-1967* (VPRS 14526), 45, noted of Thomas Johnson in 1939, "A further departure from the usual procedure adopted here was that the condemned man was asked by the sheriff in his adjoining cell if he had any final statement to make, instead of waiting until he was on the scaffold platform and unnecessarily hold up a procedure which should be carried out with as little delay as possible".

¹⁰ Reported from Melbourne in respect of 11 November, "All over the city the execution is the talk of the day", *Burra Record*, 19 November 1880, 3.

his last moments on the drop while the noose was adjusted around his neck. It is then that any last words would be said.

For Kelly's execution, the witnesses stood in the wide ground floor corridor entrance to the central hall, opposite the gallows.¹¹ They were 20 feet (6.1 metres) or further from the scaffold, which adjoins the second tier of cells 11 feet (3.3 metres) above the ground floor.¹² Even the subdued presence of more than 40 participants and observers, along with the activity on the scaffold, would create some level of background noise.¹³ This, together with "the murmured prayers of [the priests] who accompanied Kelly...would have ensured that nothing that Kelly may have said would have been audible to those watching from the floor below in the cavernous prison hall".¹⁴ The only persons near enough to hear any last words, unless he spoke out loudly, were those depicted in the *Australasian Sketcher*, identified as Dr. Barker, the two deans, acolyte and cross-bearer, the sheriff and gaol governor, two warders, and the hangman, Elijah Upjohn.¹⁵

Consequently, any quietly spoken last words would necessarily need to be relayed to the observers, most probably by the gaol governor and/or other officials. Three different eye witness reports of Kelly's last words in the Melbourne papers were noted by the *Launceston Examiner* the following Monday, a rare acknowledgement that such differences did indeed exist.¹⁶ In order of careful detail, these were the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Argus*, and the *Herald*. From this reportage, one can follow the path from factual recording to sensationalist news grab. The *Daily Telegraph* stated that:

¹¹ *Herald*, 11 November 1880, 2: The observers "pass through [an] iron grilled gate and in a few steps they confront the grim gallows...As the spectators stand on the floor below they have to gaze upwards"; *Argus* 12 November 1880, 6: "Warders were arranged on the side galleries, and the onlookers stood on the basement floor in front of [i.e. facing] the drop"; *Express and Telegraph*, 11 November 1880, 2, "The spectators were assembled in the corridor below". Reporters were present from the *Daily Telegraph*, *Herald*, *Age* (two reporters), *Anglo Australian Press Agency*, *Argus* (which also published the *Australasian Sketcher*), *Ballarat Courier*, and *Sydney Morning Herald*, listed in VPRS 4969, Unit 2, Item 78, Record 1.

¹² Measurements by author: It is 20 feet from a point directly under the centre of the drop to a point between the front steps of twin parallel staircases, which are 7 feet apart and flank the sides of the rectangular ground floor entrance corridor. This stretches 16 feet further back to the floor holes of the now-removed "iron grilled [entrance] gate". The viewing area was thus approximately 112 square feet (10.4m²).

¹³ The *Herald*, "not 50" persons in total; given "a dozen" warders and gaol officials, at least 41 persons in addition to Kelly can be counted from the signed witness list (VPRS 4969, Unit 2, Item 78, Record 1), in combination with the *Herald*: "perhaps a dozen warders and other gaol officials, and the sheriff and under-sheriff,...2 police officers, 2 detectives and 4 policemen, ... representatives of the press, a number of justices of the peace and several medical men", along with 4 churchmen and the hangman.

¹⁴ Russ Scott and Ian MacFarlane, "Ned Kelly – Stock Thief, Bank Robber, Murderer – Psychopath", *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, 21.5 (2014), 731.

¹⁵ *Australasian Sketcher*, 20 November 1880, 305; See Les Carlyon, with contributions by Ian Jones and John McQuilton, *The Last Outlaw* (South Melbourne: HSV7, 1980), 60. The *Sketcher*'s illustration was finished from a sketch drawn by J.D. Melvin, the reporter from its parent paper, the *Argus*. Ian Jones (Thomas Carrington, *Ned Kelly: The Last Stand; Edited and with an Introduction by Ian Jones*, South Melbourne: Lothian, 2003, 30) identified Carrington as the illustrator, and noted that he could have combined Melvin's sketch with "his own drawing of the gallows area – made before or after the event", to produce the accurate finished art.

¹⁶ *Launceston Examiner*, 15 November 1880, 3.

Before stepping upon the drop, an expression, with a sigh, escaped Kelly's lips, which the warders and the governor interpreted to this effect—'Ah, well, I suppose', probably meaning to say he supposed this was the last of it, or this is what it had come to, but the expression was never concluded. He had previously intimated his intention of making a speech, but his heart evidently failed him. He gave not the slightest intimation of his desire to speak, and the whole proceedings were so quickly and effectively carried out that any scene was avoided.¹⁷

This is the most detailed of the reports of an event in which no famous last words were said. Probably for that reason it has all but vanished from the voluminous Kelly commentary. Ian Jones, Australia's most prominent and influential Kelly historian, conceded that the *Telegraph* "might have come closest to the truth" in its coverage.¹⁸ It is clear from the above that only those on the scaffold could have heard anything that was said in a quiet voice, and that it was the officials who then dutifully provided the reporters with the actual words and their associated guessed meanings.

Kelly's effective reduction to silence on the drop was corroborated by the *Age*, which reported that "the condemned man made no speech, though he had expressed his intention to do so".¹⁹ Henry Glenny, J.P., uniquely thought Kelly might have said something about the placing of the rope.²⁰ Police Sergeant Anthony Trainor, who was present, told Stringybark Creek ambush survivor, Thomas McIntyre, that "immediately before the cap was drawn over his head [Kelly] glanced upwards through the skylight, and muttered something which I think was a reply to a question".²¹ This would most likely have been when he was asked if he had any last statement to make, but the exchange was inaudible to Trainor. So whence the last words?

JOURNALISTIC LICENCE

The *Argus* reported that Kelly "walked steadily on to the drop; but his face was livid, his jaunty air gone, and there was a frightened look in his eyes as he glanced down on the spectators." It then condensed the story, stating "it was his intention to make a speech, but his courage evidently failed him, and he merely said, 'Ah, well, I suppose it

¹⁷ *Daily Telegraph*, 12 November 1880, 3; Syndicated in *Kilmore Free Press*, 18 November 1880, 4.

¹⁸ Ian Jones, *Ned Kelly: A Short Life*, new ed. (South Melbourne: Lothian, 2003), 288.

¹⁹ *Age*, 12 November 1880, 2, which had two reporters at the event. The *Illustrated Australian News*, 4 December 1880, 231, similarly wrote that Kelly "had intended to make a speech, but he uttered no audible sound". Given that it was published three weeks after the trial with time for reconsideration in an atmosphere of intense public interest in the Kelly affair, it should be given full corroborative weight.

²⁰ Henry Glenny, *Jottings and Sketches, at Home and Abroad*, 3rd series (Adair: Belfast, 1889), 54, wrote that "After the noose was put over his head, he said something in a low tone of voice anent the placing of the rope, and before he had time to say anything further, the cap was pulled smartly over his eyes, the bolt immediately drawn...". Glenny stood with the other witnesses on the ground floor and similarly could not have heard any quiet words; his interpretation may be based on his seeing lip movement as the rope was being placed.

²¹ Thomas McIntyre, *A True Narrative of the Kelly Gang* (typescript, Victoria Police Museum, Item 2991, ca. 1922), 110.

has come to this', as the rope was being placed round his neck".²² The statement that Kelly had intended to make a speech, but could not, is almost identical to the wording of the *Telegraph* and suggests that this detail was told to the reporters directly afterwards, probably at the same time as they were told that, when about to be pinioned in the condemned cell by Upjohn, Kelly had said, "'There's no need for tying me', but he had to submit".²³

The extra information about the interpretation of a sighed expression by the officials is not given by the *Argus*. Readers are instead told that these were Kelly's actual last words. Even here, it is a rewriting or tidying up of the second of the two interpretive comments noted by the *Telegraph*, "this is what it had come to".²⁴ The story with its newly-minted 'last words' was promptly relayed through its syndicated news service, and became widely embedded in Kelly commentary.²⁵

A different version came from the *Herald's* reporter, James Middleton.²⁶ He stood with the other witnesses on the floor below, gazing upwards toward the gallows, and therefore at least 20 feet back from the drop.²⁷ With a flair for the dramatic and keen for a salutary tale, Middleton, who would have heard the same comments by the official(s) as the other reporters about Kelly's sighed words, penned that "as he stepped on the drop, he remarked, in a low tone, 'Such is life'".²⁸ As can be seen, it is simply a further, catchy, condensation of an official's interpretation of "'Ah, well, I suppose' with a sigh, probably meaning to say he supposed this was the last of it, or this is what it had come to". The pithy statement certainly grabbed attention. It was reproduced in a range of syndicated papers, sometimes with further creative additions.²⁹ A rival to the *Argus's*

²² *Argus*, 12 November 1880, 6.

²³ *Ibid.* The *Daily Telegraph* named warder William Buck as providing the summary, and wrote that Upjohn "proceeded to pinion Kelly. To this the prisoner demurred, saying there was no necessity for it. Upjohn, having performed the operation, left the cell". The *Herald* perhaps more glamorously wrote that Kelly "remarked, 'You need not pinion me' but was, of course, told that it was indispensable".

²⁴ A truncation into similar last words occurred in the *Sydney Morning Herald [SMH]*, 12 November 1880, 5, whose attending reporter wrote that "Kelly, on coming out [of the cell onto the gallows], exclaimed, 'Ah, well! It's come to this at last'. He...stepped on the fatal spot, where the noose was adjusted and the white cap was pulled over his face. The bolt was drawn..." The phrasing combines the two parts of the interpretive comments detailed in the *Telegraph* ("he supposed this was the last of it, or this is what it had come to"), and Kelly's sighed words have become an exclamation. This version was repeated in *SMH* syndicated papers, e.g. *Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser* (13 November 1880, 7 Supp.).

²⁵ E.g. *Australasian Sketcher* [owned by the *Argus*], 20 November 1880, 315; *Hay Standard*, 17 November 1880, 3; *Bacchus Marsh Express*, 13 November 1880, 3; *Border Watch* [S.A.], 17 November 1880, 4; Commentary, e.g. Charles Chomley, *The True Story of the Kelly Gang of Bushrangers* (Melbourne: Pater & Co., 1907), 156; William Fitchett, *Ned Kelly and His Gang* (West Melbourne: Fitchett Bros, 1938), 50; Max Brown, *Australian Son* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, rev. ed. 1981), 224.

²⁶ Witness list, VPRS 4969, Unit 2, Item 78, Record 1.

²⁷ *Herald*, 11 November 1880, 2.

²⁸ *Ibid.*; "A graphic report of an execution written in a decorous spirit enables those who are tempted to appreciate the awful consequences they expose themselves to when outraging the laws of this country, and in this respect may be thus expected to act as a deterrent". Middleton noted that "No sooner was the rope fixed than without the prisoner being afforded a chance of saying anything more, the signal was given, and the hangman, pulling down the cap, stepped back and [withdrew] the bolt".

²⁹ E.g. *Goulbourn Herald and Chronicle* (via the *Evening News*), 13 November 1880, 5; *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 13 November 1880, 14; *Warwick Examiner and Times* (via the *Observer*), 11 November 1880, 2. For creative variations see e.g. *Bendigo Independent*, 12 November 1880, 2, "as the

version, the *Herald's* account became equally well-established in Kelly lore.³⁰ From these twin peaks the creative juices of Kellyphilic historians began to flow, and over the years there has been considerable rivalry about which of these two versions should be given primacy, or even mentioned at all.³¹ A few have sought to place both in the story.

INVENTING HISTORY

Long-time Kelly enthusiast, Frank Clune, read an inspired comment in the *Bulletin* of 20 November 1880, that Kelly had "merely remarked, in unconscious paraphrase of the historical dying remark of Blind King George, 'Such is Life!'" Clune searched diligently without success for the alleged deathbed remark of King George III until a British Museum cataloguer advised him that any such attribution was "unreliable hearsay". Clune then declared that "until it's proved wrong", he would "ascribe the credit to Edward Kelly for having originated the saying, widespread in Australian usage, that signified regretful acceptance of the inevitable: 'Ah, well, such is life!'"³² This is an extraordinary claim, as the expression was long in use. The day after the execution, the *Ballarat Star* wrote that Kelly's "last exclamation, 'Such is life'-a colloquialism that is used frequently in connection with the most trivial worldly affairs-appears to have been dictated, if it were not indeed his last effort at bravado, by a cool indifference for his fate in this world or the next".³³

Not content with presenting fantasy as fact and turning Kelly into a coiner of national idiom, Clune wrote in his later *The Kelly Hunters* that "as Upjohn adjusted the noose Ned looked around him resignedly and said, 'Ah, well, I suppose it has to come to this!'. A white cap was put over his head and face. As it was pulled down over his eyes, Ned spoke three words with a sigh: "Such is life!"³⁴ Clune ignored the precise plain reporting of the *Telegraph*, and the fact that no source – including the "very rare pamphlet" that he himself reprinted as *A Noose for Ned* – has both sets of words recited on the scaffold. By making the two most quoteworthy 'last words' from the papers of the day separate and sequential, Clune distorted them into a false glorification of Kelly's

slack of the rope touched his face Kelly shook it aside with a disdainful toss of his head"; ditto *Geelong Advertiser*, 12 November 1880, 3; *Portland Guardian*, 13 November 1880, 2.

³⁰ It was perhaps most widely promulgated by belligerent Kelly advocate Jerome J. Kenneally in his *Complete Inner History of the Kelly Gang* (1929, with many subsequent editions. This was first serialised in *Stead's Review* in 1928, described in the *Horsham Times*, 9 March 1928, 2, as "a fascinating account").

³¹ Keith Dunstan (*Saint Ned*, Sydney: Methuen, 1980), 119, noted that the Melbourne Gaol tourist could "repeat those last words 'Such is life' or 'Ah well, I suppose it has come to this,' according to which Kelly historical school he belongs to". Many have remained uncertain; Keith McMenemy, *Ned Kelly: The Authentic Illustrated History* (South Yarra: Hardie Grant, 2001), 269, noted the *Argus's* "Ah, well," wording, but his chapter 19 reproduced the full *Herald* report of the execution; Peter FitzSimons, *Ned Kelly*, 688, similarly followed the *Herald's* "Such is Life" and uncritically footnoted the *Argus's* as an "alternative version". Typically the more overtly pro-Kelly writers privilege "Such is life".

³² Frank Clune, *A Noose for Ned: Reprint of a Very Rare Pamphlet with a Foreword by Frank Clune* (Melbourne: Hawthorn Press, 1948), 7-8.

³³ *Ballarat Star*, 12 November 1880, 2. The *Star* evidently sourced its last words by wire from the *Herald*.

³⁴ Frank Clune, *The Kelly Hunters* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1954), 333.

last moments, wrongly describing them as ‘a speech’ under the sway of his long-held belief that the claimed last words showed that Kelly “died game”.³⁵

Partisan academic, John Molony, seized upon an obscure hand-me-down tale from the Testro family history that he wrongly claimed as an ‘account’ by a warder, Edward Adams, to place both sets of last words in the story. In Molony’s retelling, Kelly, while being pinioned by the hangman, “turned and said to Adams, ‘Well, it has come to this’, as indeed it had...The two priests went before him...As Upjohn tied the knot, Ned looked at the crucifix steadily, stood in the full vigour of the health to which it had been deemed proper to restore him, and said ‘Such is life’”.³⁶ The original tale is striking for its claim that Adams had befriended and aided Kelly to the extent that Kelly felt comforted that Adams would be at his execution.³⁷ It also claimed that the “shocked witnesses...recoiled in horror” at the post-drop muscle contractions, despite them being described matter-of-factly by the press.³⁸ Most striking, however, is the remarkable similarity of its wording to that of the *Herald*.³⁹ No other source has any last words being spoken during the pinioning except Kelly’s widely reported objection to it, which took place within the condemned cell before he was led out onto the platform. Adams may have been one of the two warders with Kelly at the time, but the Testro tale is

³⁵ Clune, *Noose for Ned*, 9: “he expressed himself in a speech from the scaffold that was a model of terseness. Yes, he died game”.

³⁶ John Molony, *I am Ned Kelly* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1982), 252 with note 19. The “account” is in fact a piece of oral history from Adams’ brother-in-law’s side of the Testro family, two generations prior. It is not a direct account by Adams but a digression within the Testro family history to claim and narrate a link to the famous event of Kelly’s execution, the relevant chapter being titled “The Cartwrights and Ned Kelly”.

³⁷ Rex Testro, *The Testro Story 1811-1970* (Melbourne: Hawthorn Press, 1970), 89-92; An extract is reproduced in John Meredith and Bill Scott, *Ned Kelly After a Century of Acrimony* (Sydney: Landsdowne, 1980), 134-5: “Edward had been doing a few favours for his namesake outlaw which Ned apparently appreciated and Ned asked if Adams would be present at his execution. When told he would be Kelly replied ‘that comforts me’. Maybe he was also fortified by his mother who had just left requesting: ‘Mind you die like a Kelly, Ned!’...[The next day:] Before the hangman put a white hood over Kelly’s head, Ned looked across to Adams and laconically commented: ‘Well, it has come to this, Mr. Adams.’ (Some newspapers of the day erroneously reported that Kelly said this on the scaffold.)...As Upjohn placed the oiled rope around his neck Ned lamented: ‘Such is life.’ The hangman then stepped quickly...like a ballet dancer to the side...” The ballet dancer was too much for Molony, who gave the 57-year old Upjohn “the agility of a cat” instead. (The “hangman’s jig” role was already Kelly’s.) The *Argus* had said, “the hangman stepping to the side quickly drew the bolt”. In the *Herald*, “the hangman ... stepped back and withdrawing the bolt had done his work”. The claim that Ned’s mother told him to “die like a Kelly” is in the *Daily Telegraph*, 12 November 1880, 3.

³⁸ The *Herald*’s layout emphasised that the “legs were drawn up...and fell” several times, but the reporter himself “had been present on such similarly mournful occasions” and was not shocked; *Daily Telegraph*, “the slightest muscular contraction, the natural result of the sudden shock”; *Argus*, “death was instantaneous, for although muscular twitching continued for a few minutes, he never made a struggle”; *Express and Telegraph*, “beyond a slight lifting of the shoulders and a spasmodic quivering of the lower limbs, no motion was visible”.

³⁹ Most obviously, “Adams” in Testro: “Upjohn, the hangman, now walked onto the scaffold for a last minute professional check. Adams recalled that he was a big, burly, horrifying-looking man, with heavy lips and a huge nose with a carbuncle on the end”; *Herald*: “Upjohn the hangman...stepped across the scaffold quietly...he is...broad shouldered and burly...a ghastly appearance. He has heavy lips and heavy features altogether, the nose being about the most striking and ugly. It is large in proportion, and appears to have a huge carbuncle on the end”. The *Argus* described Upjohn only as an “elderly grey-headed, well-conditioned looking man”. The *Daily Telegraph* said that “his worst expression of countenance is one of sulky doggedness”.

patently a gilded lily.⁴⁰ The claim that Kelly said "Such is life" on the drop is clearly false and did not originate with Adams. Molony's unargued elevation of the Testro tale into the primary narrative of Kelly's last moments is simply an unhistorical mythologization.⁴¹

The only other source of the "Such is life" comment is found in one syndicated wire service report. It was sent soon after the execution it describes, and was published in the South Australian *Express and Telegraph* of 11 November. It later appeared in the *Ovens and Murray Advertiser* [O&M] and elsewhere. In the *Express and Telegraph* version, "Mr. Castieau, the governor of the gaol, informed the condemned man that the hour of his execution was fixed for 10 o'clock. Kelly simply replied, 'Such is life'. His leg irons were then struck off, and after a short time he was marched...to the central building".⁴² In this version Kelly is told the time of his execution on the day itself, and no last words are reported from the scaffold. It would seem that in the absence of any other last words, the wire service, which had already got the day of the conversation wrong, simply threw in Middleton's "Such is life". It fitted the context, as once Kelly knew his fate was certain he became "morose and silent".⁴³ The O&M edited the source story down to less than half the size of the *Express's* version, moved the "Such is life" sentence to the end of the article, and dropped the next sentence that had clearly placed Castieau's exchange just before Kelly's irons were removed. This editing had an interesting outcome.

Before Trove's historical document digitisation program commenced in 2008, ready comparison between variations of syndicated newspaper articles was difficult. John McQuilton, writing on Kelly three decades before Trove, and using O&M here, was alert to the timing of events and correctly allocated the claimed "Such is life" exchange with Castieau to the day before the execution.⁴⁴ Nothing prevented this, as the same-day context from the wire service had been removed by O&M. The tradition of Kelly's last words from the scaffold was long established, and McQuilton duly provided them, again referencing O&M, "As the rope was placed around his neck he said simply 'Ah, well, I suppose it had to come to this'".⁴⁵ Yet the scaffold quotation does not appear in O&M

⁴⁰ *Daily Telegraph*, 12 November 1880, 3, Kelly "emerged from the cell between two warders" for the drop. No surviving warders' roster could be located by the Victorian Public Records Office.

⁴¹ Molony (*Kelly*, 292, note 19) also erred in stating that Adams was the warder who signed Kelly's Governor letter of 5 November 1880. It was signed by warder G.W. Evans (VPRS Series 4966, Unit 2, Item 10).

⁴² *Express and Telegraph*, 11 November 1880, 2; *Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, 13 November 1880, 4; *Camperdown Chronicle*, 12 November 1880, 2; *Bunyip*, 12 November 1880, 3; *South Australian Advertiser*, 13 November 1880, 2S; *South Australian Chronicle and Weekly Mail*, 13 November 1880, 26; *Burra Record*, 19 November 1880, 3.

⁴³ Kelly had professed "to look forward to his execution without fear but he was then evidently cherishing a hope of reprieve...Latterly, however, his talkativeness ceased, and he became morose and silent", *Argus*, 12 November 1880, 6.

⁴⁴ "When told the hour of his execution had been set for 10 a.m. the next day, he murmured 'Such is life'", John McQuilton, *The Kelly Outbreak 1878-1880* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1979), 174, citing *Ovens and Murray Advertiser* (Beechworth), 13 November 1880, 4; *The Sydney Morning Herald* (12 November 1880, 5), from a report sent on the 11th, wrote that "Yesterday [i.e. 10 November] the governor of the gaol informed him that there was no hope, and told him he must prepare for the worst".

⁴⁵ McQuilton, *Kelly Outbreak*, 174 and endnote.

and presumably strayed into his book from the *Argus*. These two particular quotes never appeared together in any article of the day. The claimed Castieau exchange was alone in, and unique to, one syndicated news source. It seems that a simple mistake in referencing conjured both sets of “last words” into the story. Once there, they became an authoritative and seemingly unchallengeable statement of fact. On such mistakes legends are built.

Ian Jones brought the vision of a dual set of last words spoken on the drop to cinematic life. Despite his previously noted acceptance of the *Telegraph*'s report of Kelly's last sighed words, “Ah, well, I suppose”, as likely closest to the truth, Jones continued to favour the *Herald*'s emotionally appealing “Such is life”. Privileging it as the only version of Kelly's last words offered in his 1967 Wangaratta Kelly conference presentation, it was used alone in the opening scenes of *Ned Kelly*, the 1970 film Jones co-scripted.⁴⁶ A decade later, in the spirit of Clune, he unhistorically employed both the *Argus*'s and the *Herald*'s sets of last words together in the execution scene of his 1980 television mini-series, *The Last Outlaw*.⁴⁷ This reflected a conscious wish to place both phrases sequentially into the story.⁴⁸ While McQuilton would later praise *The Last Outlaw*'s “scrupulous attention to detail and accuracy”,⁴⁹ no source document is capable of being interpreted to allow both sets of words to be spoken on the scaffold. Such a wilful distortion of history in the face of clear evidence to the contrary illustrates the naive adulation of Kelly, and ready willingness to substitute imagination for research, that has pervaded commentary ever since Jerome Kenneally's highly partisan *Complete Inner History of the Kelly Gang and Their Pursuers* was published in 1929.

Another larger than life story surrounding the Kelly mythology was that Kelly gave a press conference before his execution. There were three steps in the construction of this imagined event. First, the *Argus* wrote that those with “cards of admission assembled in the gaol yard” and were met by the sheriff and gaol governor who “proceeded to the condemned cell, followed by the persons who had been admitted”.⁵⁰ The wording implies the whole group was led to the condemned cell, since it fails to specify that the observers remained on the ground floor while the officials went upstairs to the cell.⁵¹ The absent *O&M* subsequently enthused that “at the hour fixed for the execution, Sheriff Rede marched to the door of the press-room, and demanded...the body of Edward Kelly...Upjohn, the hangman, was shortly afterwards summoned from the

⁴⁶ Ian Jones and Glen Tomasetti, “Kelly – The Folk Hero”, in Colin Cave, ed., *Ned Kelly: Man and Myth* (North Ryde: Cassell, 1968), 102; *Ned Kelly* (1970), 3:18-21.

⁴⁷ *The Last Outlaw* (1980), disc 2, 1:32:06-14, in which his Kelly speaks out clearly and says, “Ah, well, I suppose it's come to this. Such is life”. The series was co-written and produced by Jones and his wife, Bronwyn Binns. A title slide at the start of each episode claims that “All characters [and] events ... are drawn directly from fact”.

⁴⁸ Jones, *Ned Kelly: A Short Life*, 287-8, “As he stepped onto the drop, Ned said something. To the *Herald* man, it was ‘Such is life’...The *Argus* would claim he said moments later, ‘Ah, well, [etc.]’”. In his use of “moments later”, Jones invented the possibility of two sets of last words; but this sense cannot be derived from the *Argus*'s report.

⁴⁹ McQuilton, *Kelly Outbreak*, viii.

⁵⁰ *Argus*, 12 November 1880, 6.

⁵¹ This was stated three sentences later; cf. *Daily Telegraph*, 12 November 1880, 3, and *Herald*, 11 November 1880, 2, where no potential confusion occurs.

room opposite".⁵² This implies that the press were in a combined condemned cell and press room next to the scaffold and opposite the hangman's room.⁵³ Finally, readers elsewhere were definitively told that Kelly "went willingly and submissively to the press-room where he was interviewed by the reporters".⁵⁴ It is amply evident from the detailed eye-witness accounts that no such press conference occurred. It was rather the accidental result of slip-ups in relaying and editing syndicated telegraphic news.

Gaol warder Henry White later wrote of Kelly's execution:

[Ex-Superintendent] Hare says that the coroner who held the inquest on Ned Kelly told him he seldom saw a man show so little pluck, and, if it had not been for his priest, who kept him up, he would not have been able to walk to the gallows. Inasmuch as I was present at the execution, I feel compelled to give this statement the most unqualified contradiction. Ned Kelly walked to the gallows with a firm step, and submitted to his fate without the slightest sign of timidity or fear beyond being a little paler than when in his natural condition.⁵⁵

Had there been any coherent last words, they could have added to the force of White's rebuttal but as the *Daily Telegraph* and at least three other eye-witness accounts have shown, there was nothing there to add.⁵⁶

As an aside, Molony's assertions that Kelly had been restored to the "full vigour" of health and "looked at the crucifix steadily" as he said "Such is life", are incorrect and heavily romanticised. Hare was wrong in saying that Kelly could not have walked unaided to the drop, but he was certainly not in vigorous health. Jones noted that his hands were disabled from bullet wounds.⁵⁷ The *Argus* recorded he was pale, with "a frightened look in his eyes as he glanced down at the spectators".⁵⁸ To Sergeant Trainor, "He...made an effort to advance steadily but the weakness of his knees caused his legs to bend with each step he took as he walked to the scaffold. When standing upon the drop he was steady. Immediately before the cap was drawn over his head he glanced upwards through the skylight", but said nothing intelligible.⁵⁹ Ned Kelly died without

⁵² *Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, 13 November 1880, 4. As noted earlier, *O&M* drew from the same wire source as the *Express and Telegraph*, 11 November 1880, 2, in which the press room also appears.

⁵³ In some papers this became explicit: "the warders arrived to conduct him [Kelly] to the pressroom, beside the usual place of execution", *Camperdown Chronicle*, 12 November 1880, 2; *Bunyip*, 12 November 1880, 3; *South Australian Advertiser*, 13 November 1880, 2S; *South Australian Chronicle and Weekly Mail*, 13 November, 26; *West Australian*, 23 November 1880, 3.

⁵⁴ *Burra Record*, 19 November 1880, 3.

⁵⁵ Henry White, *Crime and Criminals in Australia* (London: Ward and Downey, 1894), 251.

⁵⁶ Four eye-witness accounts if the two *Age* reporters are counted separately. There is also a widely quoted sentence in Wikipedia ("Ned Kelly") that says, "Kelly's gaol warden wrote in his diary that when Kelly was prompted to say his last words, the prisoner opened his mouth and mumbled something that he could not hear", but I have been unable to find any source or authority for it.

⁵⁷ Jones, *Ned Kelly: A Short Life*, 285: For his final portrait, "Conscious of his crippled right hand, he clenched it into a fist planted on his hip and masked his withered left arm by holding the cord attached to his leg irons"; 287, "undoubtedly suffering pain [when pinioned] as his wasted left arm was forced back and the strap buckled". He could only mark an "X" for his signature on his dictated condemned cell appeal letters.

⁵⁸ *Argus*, 12 November 1880, 6.

⁵⁹ Trainor, in McIntyre, *True Narrative*, 110.

remorse for the havoc and grief he had caused, and he came to an ignominious, mumbling end at the hands of the common hangman.⁶⁰

CONCLUSION

There were no famous last words from Ned Kelly. The image of Kelly standing tall and defiant, saying “Such is life” as the rope was placed around his neck, is nothing but a highly romanticised myth built around and over the *Herald’s* dramatic report. It has captivated many who should have seen through it, including Manning Clark.⁶¹ Centrally indebted to pro-Kelly historians Frank Clune and Ian Jones, furthered by John Molony and John McQuilton, and resting on a collective combination of factual errors, wishful thinking, and a profoundly biased selection of historical evidence, the myth continues to be perpetuated in Australian history, popular culture and school textbooks due to a striking lack of scholarly rigour where Kelly is concerned. Just as Alan Frost recently debunked many longstanding myths perpetuated by scholars about the organisation and purpose of the First Fleet, so too the foundations of much of the history and significance claimed for Kelly are long overdue for reassessment.⁶²

Although speculative, one possible source of inspiration for Middleton’s use of the expression “Such is life” is a scene in Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations* (1860-1), where Joe the blacksmith’s temperamental wife collapses after a frenzied rage. The long-suffering Joe says to his apprenticed relative Pip, “On the Rampage, Pip, and off the Rampage, Pip – such is Life”.⁶³ Kelly was off the rampage once and for all, and

⁶⁰ *Daily Telegraph*, 12 November 1880, 3, “Kelly himself, no later than Wednesday [10 November], expressed himself in profane language that Sherritt only received his desserts, and that he (Kelly) would have shot every policeman up to and in Beechworth. When asked by the gaol surgeon, also, whether he was not sorry for what he had done, he replied that he was not sorry, and that he had nothing whatever to be sorry for”. *Bendigo Advertiser*, 13 November 1880, 2, letter, “Kelly’s career has at last closed in an ignominious death, despite the wicked attempts of his idiotic sympathisers to save his life”; *Bunyip* 12 November 1880, 3, “it is to be hoped that in the face of such an ignominious end we shall not again be troubled by such a despicable lot”; *Age*, 13 November 1880, 5, “Society owes it to generations yet unborn that such men should be stamped out from the midst of us, and should not be allowed to perpetuate their evil influence. ... Precisely those who plead that Kelly was the creature of circumstances, and that we are all moulded by our surroundings, ought to understand that society is bound to put the brand of failure upon crime”.

⁶¹ Manning Clark (“Good Day to You, Ned Kelly”, in Colin Cave, ed., *Ned Kelly: Man and Myth* (North Ryde: Cassell, 1968), 21-2, eulogised that “Those who had loved him ... soon replied [to the *Argus’s* report that Kelly’s “face was livid, his jaunty air gone and there was a frightened look in his eyes” as he stepped onto the drop] that he had died like a Kelly, saying ‘Such is life’”. But the *Herald’s* report, the source of Clark’s claim, was not a ‘reply’ to the *Argus’s*. It predated it, and contained no love for Kelly. Clark seems to be under the unacknowledged sway of Nietzsche in writing that “the spirit of Dionysus ... lives in all of us” with a “nostalgia for the life of the fearless, free and bold” of Kelly’s *Jerilderie Letter*, in contrast to the ‘conformism’ of daily life and the case “for Apollo, the case for order and discipline”. It is as though Kelly symbolised Dionysus for Clark, and madness – both passion and tragedy – inevitably followed. Clark continued this intriguing theme when treating Kelly in Volume IV of his *History of Australia*, but it is a far cry from factual history.

⁶² Alan Frost, *The First Fleet: The Real Story* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2012).

⁶³ Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (London: Penguin Red Classics, 2006), 131.

Middleton used this striking phrase, possibly recalled from Dickens, for his condensation of the officials' interpretation of Kelly's last words and sigh.⁶⁴

Prominent Kelly apologist, Max Brown, related the story of a reporter in Kelly's era, who had called on the editor of "a great London newspaper" while in Paris: "I asked him if he would care to come and watch the execution of three communists at Satory. 'I go?' exclaimed my able editor. 'I go? Good gracious no; but be sure you go and write us a graphic account'".⁶⁵ Of the reporters at Kelly's execution, at least two did not disappoint. Analysis of the reportage of the day shows that the treasured stories of Kelly having said either "Such is life" or "Ah, well, I suppose it has come to this", are both wrong. Bad luck for Kellyphiles? Ah, well, I suppose.

ABBREVIATIONS

O&M – Ovens and Murray Advertiser (Beechworth).

VPRS – Victorian Public Record Series, in the Victorian Public Record Office.

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⁶⁴ Meredith and Scott, *Acrimony*, 135, did not mention *Great Expectations* but suggested two other possible sources of inspiration, including Dickens, neither of which fits the context as closely. Middleton was both dramatic and condemnatory: "at the end of four minutes it was all over and Edward Kelly had gone to a higher tribunal to answer for his faults and crimes", a blunt retort to Kelly's well-reported interruption to Judge Barry's pronouncement of the death sentence, "I dare say, but a day will come, at a bigger court than this when we shall see which is right and which is wrong" (*Argus*, 30 October 1880, 8).

⁶⁵Brown, *Australian Son*, 224.

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Ideological cynicism in the modern information age with Sloterdijk and Žižek

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Abstract: *Modernity has overseen rapid technological development, enabling unprecedented dissemination of information. This has led to enthusiasm for ‘consciousness raising’ activism as a means for creating political change. While new media opens up new potentialities, uncritical fetishisation of technology can be counter-productive. My research adopts Sloterdijk’s notion of cynicism as enlightened false consciousness to explore the negation of the emancipatory potential of knowledge, and to demonstrate how the enlightened consciousness does not necessarily act upon what it knows. This disconnection between knowing and acting is expounded by Žižek’s psychoanalytic interpretation of the enlightened false consciousness. I contend that to combat cynicism we need to go beyond information and turn towards the creative powers of the imagination. My research aims to provide a more critical relationship with new media, which does not fall to the traps of cynicism, and opens the space for transformative politics.*

Keywords: *Cynicism, false consciousness, ideology, information, imagination, action*

Basically, no one believes anymore that today's learning solves tomorrow's 'problems'; it is almost certain rather that it causes them.¹
-Sloterdijk

INTRODUCTION

In the age of digital media, we have unprecedented access to knowledge and the ability to create and disseminate our own ideas. Ideally, this would create a more democratic society, as political engagement requires access to information - no one speaks of an ignorant empowered citizen - yet the information age has met with disenchantment and apathy. As Zygmunt Bauman states in his introduction to *In Search of Politics*, there is a paradox in modern western democratic society: we proudly affirm ourselves as democratic and free, yet at the same time we do not believe we have the power to effect political change.² There are of course many contemporary examples of

¹ Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, Theory and History of Literature (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 28.

² Zygmunt Bauman, *In Search of Politics* (Oxford: Polity, 1999), 1.

political activism, however, engaging in politics is still considered an activity conducted by officials or by radicals as the very term 'activist' presumes its exclusivity. Despite living in a democracy, the etymological meaning of which is 'the rule of the people', politics is not within the script of the ordinary citizen.³

Cynicism is prevalent in contemporary society, and I argue that this obstructs political action and negates the empowering potential of knowledge. The common meaning of cynicism is an attitude of distrust in others, and in disbelief of societal betterment, a notion associated in politics with apathy. However, this everyday notion eludes its more radical and potent ideological function as '*enlightened false consciousness*', first argued by Peter Sloterdijk in his work *Critique of Cynical Reason*.⁴ The enlightened false consciousness appears immediately as an oxymoron - how can one be simultaneously informed and deceived? For Sloterdijk, the enlightened false consciousness denotes how the potency of information is annulled by 'reflexive buffering' critique: hence one is both informed yet not affected by the newly received information.

Cynicism is enlightened false consciousness. It is that modernized, unhappy consciousness, on which enlightenment has laboured both successfully and unsuccessfully. It has learned its lessons in enlightenment, but it has not and probably been not able to, put them into practice. Well-off and miserable at the same time, this consciousness no longer feels affected by any critique of ideology; its falseness is already reflexively buffered.⁵

This concept illustrates the limitations of information circulation, revealing how potentially empowering knowledge can be directed into fuelling a cynical attitude of apathy. Sloterdijk's analysis will provide a critical theoretical lens to better understand this paradox: in self-proclaimed democracies, despite the advent of new media and increased access to knowledge, political inaction and apathy increases. In the current post-Cold war political climate, Chantal Mouffe believes that the 'end of history' narrative has come to fruition at least in one significant sense.⁶ The current western model of liberal-democratic-capitalist governance has dominated the political imagination to the point that alternatives to the status quo are unimaginable, and so cynicism sustains the status quo, positioning all alternative possibilities as unrealistic. My research will utilise Slavoj Žižek's psychoanalytic interpretation of Sloterdijk to examine the psychological aspects of cynicism and its collective effects.⁷ In particular, I will explore how the affective efficacy of knowledge has been perverted as it is used to justify our inaction and the inevitability of the status quo. As Žižek states, "To be

³ There are certain examples that do push this boundary of the exclusivity of the activist; the *Occupy* movement was a failed attempt, and more recently the *Black Lives Matter* movement garners broad support from the African American community.

⁴ Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, xii.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political*, Thinking in Action (London ; New York: Routledge, 2005), 1-3, 32.

⁷ Žižek is one of the key contemporary theorists to incorporate Sloterdijk's critique of cynical into his political theory.

intelligent and still perform one's work, that is unhappy consciousness in its modernised form, afflicted with enlightenment."⁸ Finally, I will discuss the power of imagination as a possible force to breach this cycle of cynicism to renew a more optimistic and engaged political climate.

CYNICISM AS ENLIGHTENED FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS

Sloterdijk's notion of cynicism as enlightened false consciousness invokes Marx's original concept of false consciousness. For Marx, ignorance of the proletariat sustains the very conditions that oppress, either by failure to recognise their condition or by a false conviction that emancipation can be achieved through the system as it is, possibly through slow legislative reform.⁹ Marx and the Critical Theory tradition more broadly believed critique would awaken the class-consciousness of the masses as the moment the proletariat understood the truth of their condition as an oppressed class they would revolt against these conditions. Marx postulated that relationship between knowledge and action was one of cause and effect.¹⁰ The enlightened false consciousness, on the other hand, is aware of the conditions that oppress it, yet fails to act against these conditions. Cynicism brings a begrudging acceptance of the way things are and an abandonment of any hope for change which undermines the transformative potential of knowledge. Sloterdijk differentiates modern cynicism with the *kynic* of the Ancient Greeks. The *kynics* were outsiders who mocked the morality of society through public displays of satirical cheekiness and animalistic gestures. The *kynic* is described "as a lone owl and as a provocative, stubborn moralist".¹¹ In contrast, the modern cynics are not interested in public defiance: they are an anonymous mass, integrated into society, and for whom self-preservation is a cornerstone of their ethos.¹²

As Sloterdijk argues, cynicism is an ideology both in the descriptive sense, as it provides a framework for meaning and the pejorative sense in that it is self-deceptive. The cynical consciousness, according to Sloterdijk, was inherent in the Weimar Republic. After Germany was defeated in World War One, and was subsequently bound by the humiliating Treaty of Versailles, the nation fell into a cynical state of disappointment.¹³ The adoption of a cynical consciousness became a defence from future disappointment. By presuming the worst, cynics believe they are one step ahead, and so the cynical consciousness never feels fooled or deceived and takes pride at having suspicions validated. Cynics develop a false sense of superiority and security. The irony is, however, in the attempt to avoid being naively unaware of their societies' insidious underbelly; they have in the process inadvertently accepted these problematic aspects,

⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Phronesis (London ; New York: Verso, 1989), 7.

⁹ Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory : Habermas and the Frankfurt School*, Modern European Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 1-3, 58-62.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 15-17; Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 5-7.

¹¹ *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 101-03. Sometimes behaviour included obscene, shocking gestures such as such as public urination and masturbation.

¹² *Ibid.*, 3-7.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 384-414.

falling into a deeper layer of naiveté. As Sloterdijk states, “this critique has remained more naive than the consciousness it wanted to expose”.¹⁴

Cynicism is a self-fulfilling prophecy, where its own failures to intervene reproduces the conditions of cynicism. The *Rio +20 Earth Summit*, held in 2012 in Rio de Janeiro, is an example of cynicism as a self-fulfilling prophecy.¹⁵ The summit failed to obtain substantial commitment from delegates, and it was argued that the disappointing outcome was predetermined by the cynical attitude of the participants. Delegates went to the summit with low expectations and low demands, assuming that the large corporations would have their way, dominate the discourse and so determine the global response to climate change. Hence, when corporations dominated the discourse, this was treated as ‘just how things are’ or ‘how the world works’. By assuming the worst, by lacking any hope for betterment, any alternative possibilities are forestalled:

Much of the reporting of Rio reflected the profound cynicism that was the only emotion on offer. We read articles on the hotel rooms, on traffic jams, on the security. What was lost was any sense of what was truly at stake – our future on the only planet we have. Many media outlets largely ignored Rio; in others, the most important environmental conference in 20 years was reduced to a lifestyle feature¹⁶.

The release in 1860 of Multatuli’s satirical novel *Max Havelaar: Or the Coffee Auctions of the Dutch Trading Company* revealed to poor working conditions in the Dutch East Indies during the nineteenth century, and sparked public uproar in the Netherlands, triggering successful public protests against the exploitation of the workers. It ultimately helped shape Dutch colonial policy.¹⁷ While the Dutch public were genuinely ignorant of the poor labour conditions in the Dutch East Indies, current journalistic exposes on the injustices of the world merely confirm our widespread understanding of how the world operates, and it would be more surprising to hear that corporations were acting ethically in accordance to government regulations.¹⁸ Wikileaks illustrates that the publicising of government and corporate corruption does not in itself incite political action as it merely confirms what we already suspect governments secretly do. By embracing a strategic cynical attitude of suspicion, where the worst outcome is expected, one becomes immune and desensitised to information

¹⁴ Ibid., 3.

¹⁵ *Rio +20 Earth Summit (United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development)* was held twenty years after the *United Nations Conference on Environment and Development*, which was convened in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

¹⁶ F. Harvey, *Rio +20 makes no fresh, green breast of the new world*.
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/blog/2012/jun/25/rio-20-great-gatsby>, 2000.

¹⁷ Multatuli was the pen-name of Dutch author Eduard Doves Dekker; Pramodya Ananta Toer, "Best Story; the Book That Killed Colonialism," *The New York Times*,
<http://www.nytimes.com/1999/04/18/magazine/best-story-the-book-that-killed-colonialism.html?pagewanted=all>.

¹⁸ Dutch East Indies is now known as Indonesia. The book *Max Havelaar* motivated the Dutch Ethical policy, which led to the end of Dutch Colonialism, and some argue this inspired the de-colonisation movement in Africa.

that reveals dubious and unethical practices. The cynical attitude fails to address and change the conditions that initially raised the concerns. The false sense of security that cynicism provides comes at the cost of an impetus for change. Instead of being a vehicle for change, the gaining of information and knowledge is relegated to an end in itself.¹⁹

SELF-DECEPTION AT THE LEVEL OF ACTION

For Sloterdijk, the key issue with modern subjectivity is not the lack of knowledge, but rather that the power of knowledge is nullified by cynicism. When one always expects the worst, one is not surprised by the revelation of oppressive conditions: at an unconscious level there is already an acknowledgement of such conditions, and it is the underlying assumption of their worldview. The cynic might proclaim its illegitimacy but nevertheless continues to live within it, and a society that is not plagued with the same problems cannot be imagined. Hence, cynicism prescribes a self-deceptive psychological defence against what are social and political problems. Though we are not fooled in the same way as the subject of Marx's false consciousness, the effect is the same, and it stifles the ability to act against an oppressive system.

The traditional *Kynikoi* of Ancient Greece, in contrast to modern cynics, were outsiders to society who aimed to subvert society through satirical activity. The modern cynic is no longer the outsider who rejects official norms through action. They continue to sustain and reproduce society's oppressive functions, falsely believing they have no other options. They reject the norms but remain integrated in the system by default. According to Žižek, ideology is no longer the Marxist "*they do not know it, but they are doing it...*", instead it is that "*...they know very well what they are doing, yet they are doing it*".²⁰

For Žižek, Marx's concept of commodity fetishism demonstrates the layers of complexity that arise with cynicism. For example, he argues people are not completely ignorant, they know that money has value only because of the embedded socio-economic relations, but their actions betray their true unconscious beliefs. These unconscious beliefs can be understood by Žižek's concept of the 'objectively subjective truth', or what a subject really believes.²¹ As we live life by treating money as if it holds supernatural qualities, these actions reveal our objectively subjective true beliefs.²²

Žižek argues that "the very process of production functions as the fetish which conceals the crucial dimension of the form".²³ Consider the increasingly popular behind-the-scenes productions on reality television: these expose the fashion industry's methods, including the use of photo-shop, make-up, lighting, judicious editing, and special effects, to manufacture an idealised image. The exposure of the mechanism behind the fantasy does not undermine the ideological effect as these images still inform

¹⁹ Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, xii.

²⁰ Slavoj Žižek, "The Spectre of Ideology," in *Mapping Ideology* (London ; New York: Verso, 1994), 8.

²¹ Ibid., Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, Essential Žižek (London: Verso, 2008).

²² Ibid., 148.

²³ Ibid., 130.

beauty standards.²⁴ Cynicism permits us to intellectually reject the fantasies presented to us while still 'believing' them, or, as Žižek puts it, the ideology functions at the level of the doing.²⁵ This attitude is succinctly expressed as "je sais bien, mais quand-même": I know very well, but nevertheless.²⁶

Cynical ideology functions at the level of action rather than knowledge, and the power of ideology lies in people's active participation in sustaining and reproducing its own conditions. One can be against the exploitations of workers and believe these conditions are socially abhorrent and yet still sustain and reproduce the environments that allow these conditions to continue.²⁷ If ideology operates independently from belief, all efforts to educate and inform will pose no challenge. Wikileaks has been lauded for revealing the *truth* by leaking official government documents, although these accolades have focused on the role Wikileaks has played in raising awareness about government activities rather than the political change it can incite (or has failed to incite). Information is essential to political action as we cannot act without any orientation or direction, but it is not sufficient. Geuss states that the "Although reflection alone can't do away with real social oppression...Delegitimation of oppression maybe a necessary precondition of political action, which would bring real liberation".²⁸ In our information obsessed society we are in danger of fetishising the power of information, treating its instrumental value as an end in itself. There is something about the way new media has reconstructed our relationship with knowledge that has sustained cynical ideology at an unconscious level. When the conscious-raising tactics of new media fail to create the change it espouses, the disappointed cynics generalise the failures. The problem of course lies not in politics but rather a question of tactics and approaches in engaging in politics effectively.

OVER-INFORMATION

In our information-obsessed society, people are bombarded with more information than they can process and comprehend. Paul Virilio identifies two aspects to the way the public consumes information that are peculiar to new media. First, the sheer speed at which we receive information diminishes the time for digestion, contemplation and reflection. Secondly, the immense diffusion of viewpoints creates a kind of mass aporia that debilitates our ability to act in any particular direction. Virilio argues just as the military may deliberately plant multiple viewpoints within the public sphere to crush potential dissent, the public can become overwhelmed with information and push the

²⁴ In fact, sometimes the 'making of an advertisement' pseudo-documentary clips are marketed prior to the launch of an advertising campaign to generate more brand awareness.

²⁵ Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, 124.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 139.

²⁷ Žižek argues parents dress up as Santa Claus because they do not want to rob their children of this fantasy. However, the children do not believe in Santa Claus either, but they nevertheless play along. Here, no one believes in Santa Claus, yet the function and effect of believing in Santa Claus remains, along with the accompanying rituals, such as receiving presents.

²⁸ Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory : Habermas and the Frankfurt School*, 75.

issue aside as something too complex to understand: they are unable or unwilling to form an oppositional stance. The function of new media is the same.²⁹ Given the multitude of problems facing modern society, we need to prioritise how to spend our limited energies and resources as when the task looks too enormous and too difficult there are overwhelming feelings of disempowerment.

Žižek compares the reporting of the Gulf War with that of the Bosnian War. In the former, the employment of 'evil versus good' framing was used to demonise Saddam Hussein and to justify the war. In the latter, journalists focused on the complexities of the issue including the long history of conflict in the region.³⁰ Though this approach informs people of more facts, it clouds the brute reality that ethnic cleansing and genocide was rife during the war. By painting the Bosnian War as too complex for both citizens and politicians of the West to understand, people were absolved from the responsibility of intervening in the crisis. Cynicism is this aporia raised to the level of a psychological barrier: new media can present world problems as too complicated, too extensive, too global, beyond the control and understanding of any one individual, and thus, as problems we cannot hope to intervene in or politically organise to oppose. Merely being more knowledgeable about the complexity of the problems in our society does not dispel ideology nor is it necessarily empowering. When we feel overwhelmed and disempowered to change the current situation and condition, we learn to adapt and accept them. Subsequently, numbness and apathy comes from paradoxically caring.

THE SEDUCTION OF CYNICISM

The feeling of being overwhelmed and disempowered makes people susceptible to embracing what Jodi Dean calls the victimhood position. This position addresses the sense of being overwhelmed by providing a means of understanding oneself within the chaos of over-information, and the feeling of disempowerment by instilling a moral high ground, albeit a false one. When one is overwhelmed by the various unethical practises of the world one feels unable, or incapable, to intervene in a meaningful way. The victimhood position assumes an identity of hopelessness, which validates our feelings of powerlessness. Hence instead of taking the more difficult but ultimately rewarding path of politics, the cynic embraces their hopelessness.³¹

In the 2000 U.S. Presidential election the Democrat candidate Al Gore controversially lost to Republican George Bush, despite winning the popular vote. For Dean, the victimhood position is evident in the Democrat's failure to contest the results. While prominent leftist commentators argued the Republicans 'stole' the election, thus presenting themselves as victims, Dean argues the Democrats gave up and forfeited the election cynically because they were convinced of America's conservatism and their own powerlessness:

²⁹ Virilio, Paul Virilio, *Strategy of Deception* (London ; New York: VERSO, 2000), 47-48.

³⁰ Žižek, "The Spectre of Ideology," 4-5.

³¹ Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies : Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 4-6.

[The Left was] convinced that the country was republican, conservative, capitalist, Christian fundamentalist, and evangelical. It's almost as if we believed in their strength and unity, their power and influence, more than they did themselves. So we submitted to what we loudly lamented as our own worst nightmare.³²

When the Left argued Bush won the election because America was becoming increasingly more conservative, they absolved themselves of the responsibility for their own inaction while maintaining their moral superiority. This event shows the temptation of the victimhood position for the modern cynic: they cannot be accused of being naïve, nor can they be reproached for any political failures.³³

Dean points towards the Black Power movement, the Sisterhood movement, and the Queer movement as examples of political struggles that have refuted the victimhood position.³⁴ These movements are premised on agency, strength, and self-determination.³⁵ Though there are of course marginalised sectors of society who are victims of oppression, however, recognising and acknowledging this is different from assuming victimhood as a mode of being or an emblem of one's identity. A sense of empowerment is necessary for people to overcome their oppressive conditions, something they cannot achieve if they mobilise around victimhood as something essential to their experiences.

Dean's notion of victimhood is indebted to Nietzsche's concept of resentment. The link between Sloterdijk's notion of cynicism and resentment is analysed by Robert Halsall through Sloterdijk's *Contempt for the Masses: Essay on the Culture Wars in Modern Society*. Halsall distinguishes resentment from ressentiment by arguing that while resentment can motivate political action through revenge, ressentiment is a generalised feeling that seeks symbolic revenge rather than political outcomes:

First, whereas resentment is specific in targeting its blame, the feeling of ressentiment is generalized: it seeks to identify someone or something, a target, however imprecise, responsible for the feelings of contempt which the mass subject feels. Second, whereas resentment can be channelled into overturning the political circumstances responsible for the state of affairs, ressentiment finds no specific political or other outlet, and is thus converted into a general feeling of contempt for all 'higher' things, a desire for symbolic revenge.³⁶

Rage and Time is a later work of Sloterdijk where he discusses Nietzsche's concept of resentment in relation to rage. As Nietzsche situates the origin of resentment in Christian (slave) morality, Sloterdijk considers resentment as the deference of rage,

³² Ibid., 5.

³³ Ibid. Dean's notion of victimhood is rooted in Nietzschean concept of resentment

³⁴ For example, some feminists use the term 'survivor' to describe what legally is defined as a sexual assault victim.

³⁵ Alberto Altés Arlandis, "Sharing, Displacing, Caring: Towards an Ecology of Contribution," in *Intravention, Durations, Effects: Notes of Expansive Sites and Relational Architectures*, ed. Oren Lieberman Alberto Altés Arlandis (Germany: Umeå School of Architecture, 2013), 279.

³⁶ Robert Halsall, "Sloterdijk's Theory of Cynicism, Resentment and 'Horizontal Communication'," *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics* 1, no. 2 (2005): 147.

where the afterlife will rectify any injustices. This typifies modernity's approach to overcoming and suppressing rage, which Sloterdijk contrasts with the Ancient Greek *thymotic* (of pride and spirit) approach of harnessing rage.³⁷ While Sloterdijk departed from his critical theory heritage when criticising communism as a form of resentment (which brought him criticism from old supporters including Žižek), nonetheless one can draw the connection between cynicism's ability to suppress rage instead of utilising it towards political action. Sara Ahmed similarly argues that the fetishisation of the wound is a form of Nietzsche's resentment. Transforming the wound into an identity involves substituting politics (an action) for revenge (a reaction):³⁸

I agree with the transformation of the wound into an identity is problematic. One of the reasons that it is problematic is precisely because of its fetishism: the transformation of the wound into an identity cuts the wound off from a history of 'getting hurt' or injured. It turns the wound into something that simply 'is' rather than has happened in time and space. The fetishisation of the wound as a sign of identity is crucial to 'testimonial culture', in which narratives of pain and injury have proliferated.³⁹

When one is bombarded and overwhelmed with the different problems of the world, victimhood is a comforting and affirming position. However as Ahmed puts it, the position ultimately increases the pain and injury it aims to address, and it enables us to "deal with it" without affecting any real change. Sharon Stanley places cynicism as the successor of the enlightenment: it has taken the lessons of challenging traditions and religions to their logical conclusions but without rebuilding a better alternative world.⁴⁰ Kant wrote in *What is the Enlightenment?* that enlightenment involved not only possessing knowledge but also acting upon the knowledge: he concluded "The motto of enlightenment is therefore: Sapere Aude! [Dare to be wise!] Have courage to use your understanding!"⁴¹ My research argues that cynicism is precisely the immature, self-deceptive attitude of the coward, scared by past failures. The path to escaping the self-depiction of cynicism is to move away from informational, sound-bite new media and promote the expansion of discursive and visionary forms of knowledge.

THE NARROWING OF IMAGINATION AND THE CONTRACTION OF VISION

I argue that political *vision* is essential for any politics, as the imaginative aspect of vision enables us bring forth new modes of organising that challenge the current conditions of society. Sheldon Wolin argues all political theory and thought is

³⁷ Peter Sloterdijk and Mario Wenning, *Rage and Time : A Psychopolitical Investigation*, Insurrections: Critical Studies in Religion, Politics, and Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 25-28.

³⁸ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 32.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Stanley Sharon, "Retreat from Politics: The Cynic in Modern Times," *Polity* 39, no. 3 (2007): 401-02.

⁴¹ Immanuel Kant, Hugh Barr Nisbet, and Immanuel Kant, *An Answer to the Question 'What Is Enlightenment?'*, Reprint ed., Great Ideas (London: Penguin, 2009), 1.

imaginative because imagination plays an essential role in creating coherence out of a chaotic world⁴². Even theorists of rationality and liberal procedural democracy such as John Rawls employ imaginative devices such as the 'veil of ignorance'. Dismissing the imagination as the domain of mere fiction and illusion overlooks the role it plays in structuring how we understand and make sense of reality. Cornelius Castoriadis' project is set against the under-appreciation of imagination within philosophical thought and politics.⁴³ Castoriadis outlines two definitions of imagination developed from Aristotle's work: a primary and a secondary form. The secondary form is the common understanding of imagination, one that imitates, reproduces, or combines pre-existing representations and forms, while the primary form of imagination (or what Castoriadis describes as *radical imagination*) brings out something new - it has the quality of natality. Radical imagination's transformative powers lie in its ability to redefine the very parameters of politics.⁴⁴

With the 'End of History' and the end of the communist experiment, there has been a vacuum of alternative grand political narratives to challenge current political hegemonies. Frederic Jameson famously proclaimed that "it's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism". It is this dearth of imaginative possibilities that underlies the familiar, cynical expression 'there is no alternative'.⁴⁵ We need to go beyond this mindlessness: we have become so desensitised to the perils of the world that the image of a starving child has become a cliché. Instead, we need to re-imagined new structure and modes of organisation, one where the starving child no longer exists. Of course, this is not an easy task, and it can be met with the same cynical attitude. Theorists such as Fisher and Žižek have proposed that to challenge the current liberal political hegemony with an alternative vision is perhaps one of the most difficult tasks of contemporary politics. While any attempt to re-imagine new alternatives may be met with obstacles and even failures, there is the potential for political transformation by going beyond facts and information to instil faith and courage.⁴⁶ Foucault uses Kant's analysis of the French Revolution to argue that the significance of the Revolution lay in its spectacular quality: the revolution on the streets instilled the conviction that the values it aspired to were possible.⁴⁷ The success of the Revolution was in the fervour and enthusiasm it aroused, and which triumphed over cynicism.

In his book *Cynicism and Postmodernity*, Timothy Bewes aims to discern the relationship between these two concepts, and he adopts Sloterdijk's distinction between ancient and modern cynics, describing the latter as a typical postmodern

⁴² Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision; Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Boston,: Little, 1960), 18-20.

⁴³ Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Castoriadis Reader*, Blackwell Readers (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 319-20.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 321.

⁴⁵ Frederic Jameson, "Future City," *New Left Review* May-June, no. 21 (2003).

⁴⁶ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism : Is There No Alternative?* (Ropley, England ; Washington, DC: O Books, 2009), 10-13; Žižek, "The Spectre of Ideology," 1-2.

⁴⁷ Michel Foucault and Michel Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others : Lectures at the College De France, 1982-1983* (Basingstoke New York: Palgrave Macmillan ; St Martin's Press, 2010), 18.

characteristic.⁴⁸ For Bewes, former U.K. Prime Minister Tony Blair's 'third way' politics typifies postmodern cynicism, where Blair justifies the Labour party need's to adapt to the political "realities" and go beyond the traditional political division of left and right. What Blair fails to recognise is that transforming the current realities (generally for better) is precisely the *raison d'être* of politics. While for the most part Bewes' work is levelled against postmodernism as an ally of depoliticisation, he also recognises it is a diverse concept, and in fact Bewes speaks of nostalgia for the critical version of postmodernism.⁴⁹ This critical postmodernism is best described in the appendix of Lyotard's work *Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?* Here Lyotard defines postmodernism as that which presents the unrepresentable, and which brings out the invisible to re-envision our reality. Bewes argues that politics needs to inhabit the space between political integrity and reality, to be both critically distance and politically engaged.⁵⁰ In this vein, Bewes accuses Sloterdijk of a variant of postmodernism for his prescription of overcoming the failures of the enlightenment by recovering the Diogenes' cheekiness in the tradition of the Kynics.⁵¹ Bewes argues that Sloterdijk abandons the critical enlightenment project of improving society and hence falls into the cynical trap he aims to overcome. While there is space for cheekiness and satire in politics, this needs to be accompanied by the critical postmodernism which challenges the current realities by bringing out the invisible, the unrepresentable and opening space for transformation.

Art is another space for collective imagination and in *Aesthetic and World Politics* Roland Bleiker analyses the political potential of poetry.⁵² He discusses the work of Korean poet and activist Ko Un who was involved in the democratic movement in South Korea. His poetry gave voice to marginalised voices criticising the military dictatorships of South Korea.⁵³ Ko Un was a true believer in poetry's ability to create social and political change, and he read his poetry to a diverse audience from factory workers to university students. Bleiker argues Ko Un approach to poetry made him a vital part of cultural and literary movement in Korean that led to the revolution which in turn led to the first popular election in Korea. The successful influence Ko Un's poetry lies in its ability to counter the Japanese colonial heritage by offering a new collective consciousness that aimed to triumph over the pre-existing establishment, and create a new better future for Korea.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Timothy Bewes, *Cynicism and Postmodernity* (London ; New York: Verso, 1997), 2.

⁴⁹ Bewes argues that the metaphysical uncertainty of postmodernism has been inappropriately applied to politics. While it makes sense to question the attainability of metaphysical absolutes, politics is not concerned with obtaining certainty but rather striving towards an unattainable horizon. While deconstructing socially constructed binaries is useful on a metaphysical level and can have critical and progressive political potential, this generalised approach of insecurity applied to politics disables any action. *Ibid.*, 48.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵² Roland Bleiker, *Aesthetic and World Politics (Rethinking Peace and Conflict Studies)*, ed. Oliver Richmond, *Rethinking Peace and Conflict Studies* (New York Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 84-140.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁵⁴ Ko Un poems were concerns with the search of Korean identity during the post-colonial rule by Japan, as the Japanese attempted to erase Korean culture and language.

LOOKING FORWARD

The form of new media reinforces cynical ideology with the popular new media platforms which promote sound-bite information. In an increasingly commodified and consumer-driven society, information is designed for speedy consumption, packaged in neat palatable visuals and digestible format.⁵⁵ This form of knowledge is the antithesis of meaningful knowledge which contextualises information. It tells us facts, but not how to enact upon the new found knowledge. The messages of political opposition circulating within the digital media platform from blogs posts and twitter updates are just another contribution, another opinion, as meaningful and politically powerful as our daily garbage.⁵⁶ There are of course examples where technology has played a positive role in activism. Most notably the Arab Spring drew a lot of attention for the use of social media, with some pundits dubbing it the 'Twitter revolution'. While social media facilitated the dissemination of information, the over exaggeration of its significance has been at the expense of undermining the importance of on-ground community organising. For the Arab protestors, the Internet supplemented but never substituted political action: they recognised the importance of physical presence as a mode of dissent.⁵⁷ It was these protestors, not the online tweets, who toppled Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak. Similar arguments can be made in regards to the Occupy movement or the Black Lives Matter movement. My essay is not advocating abandoning engagement with new media, but rather adopting a more critical response against the current fervour of technological fetishism. This involves firstly understanding that technology cannot substitute spatial mobilisation of masses, community building or campaigns that work towards long-term goals. We need to resist replicating the advertising techniques of sensationalist sound-bite modes of communicating that new media favours and aim for meaningful engagement.

Sharon Stanley argues against the views of Sloterdijk and Žižek that all forms of cynicism are apathetic and needs eradication. Instead, she proposes to develop a politics that is appropriate to the cynical age and integrates its insights. For Stanley, no one is fully cynical, there are only partial cynics. She gives the example of someone who mocks reality television but who are still politically hopeful.⁵⁸ In fact, Stanley argues a dosage of cynicism can help inform our politics by giving us better ideas of the obstacles and act as "provocative gadflies".⁵⁹ While it is true that there are different degrees of cynicism which vary depending on the object it is directed towards, the Sloterdijk notion of cynicism as false consciousness is more than mere apprehension, criticism, or understanding of obstacles and difficulties of politics: rather, it is the generalised feeling

⁵⁵ Paul A. Taylor and Jan LI Harris, *Critical Theories of Mass Media : Then and Now* (Maidenhead: McGraw Hill/Open University Press, 2008).

⁵⁶ Jodi Dean, *Blog Capture : Feedback and Capture Inthe Circuits of Drive* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), 95-97.

⁵⁷ Dhiraj Murthy, *Twitter : Social Communication in the Twitter Age*, Digital Media and Society (Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012), 95. R Srinivasan, "Taking Power through Technology in the Arab Spring," (2012).

⁵⁸ Sharon, "Retreat from Politics: The Cynic in Modern Times," 401.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 405.

of despair and distrust in the world and its future. As Bewes claims, cynicism is the “*formalisation of an endemic disappointment*”.⁶⁰

David Mazella’s work, *The Making of Modern Cynicism*, is similarly wary of denunciations of cynicism, in particular a moralistic response to cynicism that dismisses legitimate feelings of alienation.⁶¹ He cites Senator William Benton of Connecticut calling public cynicism “the gravest problem of America” as an example where the politicians are not interesting in understanding and addressing cynicism but instead shut down public dissent of political institutions.⁶² This results in maintaining the very institutions and power structures that have created the disenchantment of the cynics.⁶³ Mazella argues that critics of cynics are too quick to dismiss cynicism out of impatience to action, a fault of both the left and right: “Many of the attacks on cynicism, whether from the political right or left, are based on an untenable distinction between political action and political language”.⁶⁴ However, what Mazella fails to recognise, which Žižek points out poignantly, is that cynicism is precisely the divorce of action and thought. Political action does involve taking stances. Constant deference leads to inaction although this does not forestall revision or continuous dialogue and conversation concerning politics. Action and thinking should be viewed as two threads forming one strong rope that help elevates our society.

CONCLUSION

New media diverts political dissatisfaction and energy into ineffective forms of activism, and when it inevitably becomes apparent to the activists themselves that it is ineffective – because nothing has changed – disappointment and feelings of disempowerment create the ripe conditions for cynicism. My thesis has analysed some of the political limitations of information and consciousness-raising, in particular focussing on Sloterdijk’s notion of cynicism and how it divorces action from knowledge. My research takes the crucial step in problematising the conscious-raising activism to provide a space to pause and reflect on whether the desired ends, in this case political change, are met. Using psychoanalysis, my research illustrates how cynicism can provide satisfaction for people even when they are in a situation contrary to their explicit beliefs. Hence in our informational world, the oversaturation of knowledge leads to paradoxical effect of not emancipating people but overwhelming the subject and paralysing them from action. Information can lead to a sense of powerlessness and hopelessness detrimental to political action, contrary to the intentions of the

⁶⁰ Bewes, *Cynicism and Postmodernity*, 6.

⁶¹ David Mazella, *The Making of Modern Cynicism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 11. Mazella aims to trace the transformation of the ancient cynic to the modern cynic with purpose of better understanding the contemporary cynic, tracing the emergences of the modern cynic to the time period of late 18th century and early 19th century, coinciding with disappointing failure of the Enlightenment project.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 224.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

enlightenment project. The position of the victim is dressed up through resentment to a position of moral superiority, and this sense of (false) strength derived from victimhood quells the emancipatory potential of fighting against the oppressive structural conditions imposed. Hence, the victimhood position of the cynic becomes reified, a subjectivity void of responsibility and commitment to structural conditions of the world. To avoid creating an ironically cynical view of cynicism; my thesis argues we can overcome the cycle of cynical ideology through the expansion of our collective imagination. I argue that by posing an alternative vision of the world, one can foremost overcome the sense of hopelessness, the status quo becomes contingent and no longer inevitable: rather, a better world is possible. Further, vision situates information into a broader context; placing people within a narrative from which they can draw meaning and hence direct them towards action. The aim of this research is to elucidate some core errors plaguing modern society, with the intention of provoking more thought on the how to avoid the cynical ideology of false enlightened consciousness. There is no fool-proof blueprint for effective political action, but if we want to transform the structure of society, to create a more fulfilling society, one that satisfies our desires and interest, we need to participate in real political action. One cannot retreat from the public realm of action out of fear of failure.

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Book Reviews

Der Abu Ballas-Weg. Eine pharaonische Karawanenroute durch die Libysche Wüste

Frank Förster

Africa Praehistorica 28, Köln 2015; Hardcover; 620 pages; 376 figures; 23 tables; RRP €78; ISBN 978-3-927688-42-1.

This book is the culmination of extensive research into the Pharaonic caravan route through the Egyptian Western Desert, the so-called Abu Ballas Trail. The resulting monograph stems from Förster's PhD thesis completed at the University of Cologne in 2011. The analysis of material in this well-written tome is based on archaeological investigations carried out under the auspices of the Cooperative Research Centre 389 ACACIA project at the University of Cologne.

After an introduction that covers the research history of the Abu Ballas Trail and the notable contributions Carlo Bergmann, the book delves into a lengthy tripartite discussion and analysis of the finds, use and purpose, and historical considerations of the trail. The first part presents an analysis and interpretation of the findings from the archaeological investigations. The dominant chapter of this part involves an excellent outline of the ceramics, rock-cut engravings, and unique finds from the archaeological investigations. The evaluation of this material has led to the notion that the caravan route was used episodically, covering a distance of about 400 km from Dakhleh Oasis to the Gilf Kebir Plateau. It has been suggested that it may also extend towards Djebel Ouenat, the nearest water source to the end of the trail. While the trail may have originated out of Dakhleh Oasis, the location of its final destination is not certain, with Förster suggesting a terminus in the sub-Saharan region of the north-west Sudan.

This is followed by considerations of the practical use of the trail in part two. An extended discussion on the use of the donkey during the Pharaonic period highlights the strategies that those using the trail would have undertaken to transport goods to and from Egypt via the Abu Ballas Trail. The effort required to undertake expeditions along the extend route have been estimated from the large amount of storage jars that have been preserved at multiple sites running the course of the trail. The discussion of the use of these way-stations gives an important insight into the capabilities of those utilising the Abu Ballas Trail, and the maintenance required to sustain its effective use. It is clear from Förster's discussion that their use as watering stops presented a large logistical undertaking in both material and human resources. This section of the publication also highlights the fact that the Egyptians interacted with the local inhabitants of the Western Desert, and beyond, as evidenced by distinct archaeological material for other cultures, such as the Sheikh Muftah.

The last part proposes approaches to the purpose and historical significance of the Abu Ballas Trail. Chapters 16 to 18 of this section are arranged according to the archaeologically attested periods stemming from the excavated material found along the Abu Ballas Trail. The Abu Ballas Trail seems to have primarily been in use from the late third millennium BC, corresponding with the late Old Kingdom/First Intermediate Period. It was used intermittently throughout the Second Intermediate Period and into the New Kingdom. Förster suggests that the route was used to access tradeable items from sub-Saharan regions, including incense, ivory, skins, and oils. These would have been imported into Dakhleh Oasis, where they could then be transported and exchanged to the Nile Valley. These chapters trace the development of the use of the trail through each epoch that is attested, providing a background and context to the connection with Dakhleh Oasis and the Nile Valley. Importantly the discussion here incorporates material from other sources, mostly inscriptional in nature, to provide explanations about the use of the route. The analysis undertaken here emphasises the episodic nature of expeditions through this part of the Sahara, highlighting perhaps an ad hoc approach to trade with regions beyond the Western Desert. Notably the organisational and logistical skills required to trade along this arduous route show the capabilities of the Egyptians from at least the late Old Kingdom onwards.

This book makes an invaluable contribution to understanding the Egyptian interest in the Western Desert beyond Dakhleh Oasis, highlighting the connection they had with the sub-Saharan region through multiple time periods. The structured nature of this volume provides a distinctive accessibility to the different regions and find-spots along the route (chp. 5), as well as the exhaustive discussion of the find material within these regions (chp. 6). For those interested in this region of Egypt, the historical discussion (chps. 16-18) provides a chronological overview of the use the Abu Ballas Trail that complements other archaeological investigations and excavations in the Western Desert undertaken by the Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire, and the Dakhleh Oasis Project. Most importantly, this book shows that the Egyptian world extended beyond the Western Desert, enlarging the geographic and political scope in which the Egyptians interacted and operated. This thankfully challenges dated notions of a narrow Egyptian worldview, extending the reach of Pharaonic cultural contact into the Libyan Desert, prompting a reconsideration of the significance of this contact between Egyptians and neighbouring cultures within this broad region. This is certainly a volume that would benefit any who are interested in Egyptian interconnections from the Old Kingdom through to the late New Kingdom, and more specifically those with an interest in the Western Desert. It is useful for those archaeologists, historians, and students interested in desert road archaeology, though also those interested in trade, logistics, and the interactions with the arid zone of the Sahara.

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Elephantine XXXI. Kisten und Schreine im Festzug: Hinweise auf postume Kulte für hohe Beamte aus einem Depot von Kult- und anderen Gegenständen des ausgehenden 3. Jahrtausends v. Chr.

Andreas Dorn with a contribution by Erico Peintner

Harrassowitz Verlag, Archäologische Veröffentlichungen 117, 2015; Hardcover; 268 pages; 31 figures; 14 tables; 16 plates; RRP €98; ISBN 978-3-447-10481-4.

The Archäologische Veröffentlichungen series has yet again produced some uniquely fascinating results stemming from the archaeological investigations conducted by the *Deutsches Archäologisches Institut* on Elephantine Island. This volume, the 31st to have such a focus, draws attention from excavations conducted in the south-eastern part of the island, more specifically from the large state building discovered in this part of the island. Here the recovered material from 40 years of excavations inside and out of so-called “House 2” forms the subject of the present volume by Andreas Dorn, with a notable contribution by Erico Peintner. This is the revision of Dorn’s work from the Universität Basel.

The excavations produced an array of items including wooden boxes, shrines, a plain statue, cylinder seals, as well as an alabaster offering table. One alabaster cylinder bears the titulary of Unas (chp. XI). Indeed, Unas may have visited the island, which Dorn suggests links with the graffiti found on the east side of the island. Dorn has deduced that the shrines were used in processions for honouring deceased individuals from the region. These shrines were reused in the processional ceremonies, noting their importance. Interestingly, copious sealing fragments, or potentially locking mechanisms, were recovered from the excavations. These date from throughout the late Old Kingdom and into the First Intermediate Period, helping to indicate a date or use for the building.

One of the focuses of the volume centres on the unique wooden box labelled with the name of Heqaib. This box is decorated with false doors on each of the longer sides. These wooden boxes also seem to have been used in part of the procession for honouring the deceased. The detailed discussion of the conservation of the recovered wooden objects by Erico Peintner provides a useful insight into the reconstruction and interpretation of this material from the site. This is noteworthy in its contribution to the overall understanding of objects from House 2, and their subsequent interpretation by Dorn.

The book begins with acknowledgements of the excavations of House 2 prior to the 1995 season, which is followed by a brief discussion of the missions from 1995-1998 and 2000-2006. Next is a discussion of the interpretation and dating of the wooden panels discovered within House 2, as well as a consideration of the building’s use and function. This helps to contextualise the dating of some of the excavated finds. Objects inscribed with the names and titles of Mechus, Sobekhotep, Heqaib, and Sabni form the subject of a short chapter (chp. V), though this makes an important connection between House 2 and the burials at Qubbet al-Hawa. The panels most likely date to the late Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period, based on the representations inscribed on them and compared to examples from other parts of Egypt (chp. VII). The construction and

use of House 2 is also discussed as part of the very well organised and micro-managed structure of the publication. The consideration that House 2 may have originally been the residence of Heqaib offers an interesting development of the building. It seems that the building was used in an official capacity, rather than as a private residence after the death of Heqaib.

Short chapters follow on the *ka*-shrines from Elephantine and the identification of objects. The central chapters of this volume form the discussion and comparative analysis of the shrines and boxes, with several notable examples with identified owners. This is complemented by suggestions regarding their use in processions and celebrations connected to the deceased's *ka* (chp. VIII). The reuse of the shrine of Heqaib is notable.

An interesting examination of locking mechanisms or sealings rounds out the in-depth chapters from this book. The numerous sealings are well presented in this chapter (chp. IX), set in well-drawn images of these. The discussion (chp. XII) of the role of Elephantine as an administrative and religious centre highlights connections between the evidence from House 2 and officials such as Heqaib and Sabni.

Peintner's contribution regarding the conservation of wooden objects provides an insight into what cleaning and restorative techniques were applied to this type of evidence. This analysis provided critical information about the materials employed by the Egyptians in the creation of these wooden boxes, the type and quality of wood used, and the application of any decoration. This section is certainly useful for conservators working with such objects.

The extensive catalogue and indices at the rear of the book provide a useful resource for consultation of the material listed above. This makes a welcome addition for those studying such objects from the late third millennium, and is useful for comparison with material from other sites.

This volume makes an important contribution to understanding numerous aspects regarding the role and function of Elephantine, and more specifically House 2 as a state building during the late Old Kingdom and into the First Intermediate Period. The administrative connection between some of the objects recovered from excavations at this site and well-known individuals from the region highlights the offices that people such as Heqaib and Sabni occupied during their lives. The unique finds and their careful restoration provide more examples of the wooden boxes and shrines used in processions celebrating the deceased. Such evidence is useful for those interested in wide ranging studies, applicable to settlement archaeology, religious and administrative offices during the late Old Kingdom, private religion, and the role of Elephantine as a centre in this part of Upper Egypt.

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Greek Theatre in the Fourth Century B.C.

Csapo, Eric, Hans Rupprecht Goette, J. Richard Green, Peter Wilson (eds)

De Gruyter, 2014; Hardcover; 578 pages; 36 colour plates; numerous B&W illustrations; RRP \$130; ISBN 978-3-11-033748-8.

This is an impressive volume with a wealth of latest research on this important era in Greek theatre, a time which reflects significant cultural developments. The sixteen papers included stem from a 2011 Classics conference in Sydney and are grouped in four sections: Theatre Sites, Tragedy and Comedy, Performance outside Athens, and Finance and Records in Athens. The topics covered range from Theatre, Religion and Politics at Alexander's Travelling Court, to the Inscribed Public Records of the Dramatic Contests at Athens, and in conjunction with excellent illustrations and footnotes throughout, this work is a goldmine for historians and archaeologists.

The editors in their introduction situate the material within the context of various debates about the role of fourth century theatre, noting its central role in Hellenisation, and the relationship with earlier theatre. Contrary to the prevailing view that this was a period of theatrical decline, they argue successfully that this was a period of great innovation and expansion. They note the value of theatre as Hellenic propaganda, and many of the articles indeed discuss theatre outside of Athens. The work provides an excellent overview through presenting a range of in-depth explorations. I will briefly mention just eight of the papers as representative of the sixteen, all of which are of a very high quality.

Christina Papastamati-von Moock's chapter on "The Theatre of Dionysus Eleuthereus in Athens" provides rich evidence from analysis of excavations, and discusses the nature of retaining walls, the positions of pedestals and statues, and evidence for the cultural renewal of the Lycurgan period. This is an excellent chapter and a good selection for opening the book as it is well-illustrated, highly-detailed, and makes many good points that are somewhat representative of the volume as a whole.

Jean-Charles Moretti discusses in his "Evolution of Theatre Architecture Outside Athens," the development of both wood and stone theatres. He covers the developments in materials and form, and changes in the orchestra, koilon, perimeter walls, and auditorium. His lengthy section on the types of stage-building and their actual theatrical use is particularly interesting.

While many chapters are of a more archaeological bent, Sebastiana Nervegna's analysis of the "The Tragic Canon in the Fourth Century and Beyond" raises interesting questions about why certain plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides survived and why others were neglected. She discusses the re-performance of many plays in Southern Italy and Rome and how the plays of the "big three" were received. Why did certain tragedies become international favourites as evidenced on various kraters? This is an area requiring further research.

While Nervegna covered tragedy, Andrew Hartwig explores comedy and its evolution in the fourth century. He surveys the important changes in comedic style, especially the move to more mythological comedy and its relationship to para-tragedy. He also discusses some possible reasons behind these developments, and notes the

fourth century reception of fifth century political and personal satire. Hartwig's comments on the internationalisation of comedy and the role of comedic *agon* are apposite.

Brigitte Le Guen's chapter on Alexander's travelling court and its spread of Greek theatre is especially interesting as it demonstrates just how central Greek plays were to the spread of Hellenisation across West Asia. She deals with the important question of what significance the Greek theatrical *agon* and related athletic and musical contests had to the conquered populations. Le Guen notes relevant comments by Plutarch and Arrian of Nicomedia and others, and tabulates these according to date and place. She shows that these contests were both for the enjoyment of the soldiers and also to communicate the power of the victorious king as warrior and saviour. Theatre is thus seen as a tool of diplomacy, which was one of Alexander's greatest strengths in his expansive endeavours.

Again in a contrast to Le Guen's journey East, Edward Robinson moves west and discusses "Greek Theatre in Non-Greek Apulia". This addresses the important questions of how Italians received the plays, and the wider issue of the extent of Hellenisation of Southern Italy. Robinson makes some important observations about the differences in reception by the Italian elites and the common consumer, and relates this to other regions.

David Braund and Edith Hall take a journey north to the Black Sea, and discuss literary and archaeological evidence for how colonial settlements developed their own stories to link themselves with "Mother Greece" and surprisingly, other cities further afield. They raise questions particularly about the place of the theatrical competitions in the development of the Dionysiac cultus.

The final chapter on public records in Athens gives us new insights into the dramatic contests and their differences over time. Benjamin Millis reconstructs the textual evidence and articulates various possible meanings for the competitive and other aspects of the plays. He notes some radical changes in the contests, and the dating and purpose of Victor Lists. It must be said that the other eight chapters also contain a wealth of information on Greek theatre both in Athens and across the wider West Asian region. The standard of research and footnoting is very high, and readers will find much of interest.

One useful feature of this volume is the presentation of distinct indexes, and the extensive bibliography is also noteworthy. For a feast of information worthy of a Greek play, it is hard to go past this weighty tome. This work will provide researchers with numerous starting points for years to come, and it should be of great interest to historians and archaeologists of the fourth century Greek world.

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Meister Eckhart: Philosopher of Christianity

Kurt Flasch, trans. by Anne Schindel and Aaron Vanides

Yale University Press, 2015; Hardcover; xv + 321 pages; RRP \$38; ISBN: 9780300204865.

This excellent translation by Anne Schindel and Aaron Vanides makes available in English the most important monograph on Eckhart in recent years by renowned philosopher Kurt Flasch. Originally published in German as *Meister Eckhart: Philosoph des Christentums* (3rd edition in 2011 from C. H. Beck), this study is a sequel to Flasch's equally important *Meister Eckhart: Die Geburt der "Deutschen Mystik" aus dem Geist der arabischen Philosophie* of 2006 (not available in English) and witnesses the return of the important scholar of the so-called "Bochum-school" to the issue which has dominated much of his academic career: should Meister Eckhart be primarily characterised as a mystic, or a philosopher? Flasch has argued throughout his many scholarly publications that Eckhart must be considered the latter. In this newly available study, Flasch demonstrates that the Meister desired in his oeuvre to cultivate a new "Philosophy of Christianity" based upon a radical metaphysical interpretation of the Christian tradition, through an in-depth philological and philosophical investigation of Eckhart's writing and reception. Flasch has consciously developed this position against those scholars, such as Kurt Ruh, who instead have (erroneously, in Flasch's view) sought to present Eckhart's philosophy as exegetically motivated or have attempted to describe it as a 'rational' or 'intellectual' mysticism. Until this new translation, this debate has primarily raged only in German and French scholarship— all the major works by Flasch and his supporters tend to be published in German, whereas the major English language scholars who work on Meister Eckhart and his tradition have privileged the interpretation of Eckhart as a mystic (one thinks of Bernard McGinn, Frank Tobin and Oliver Davies). Schindel and Vanides in their translation have provided an English rejoinder to these voices and allowed for greater access to the debate about the Meister's identity for students of Eckhart in the English-speaking academy.

Flasch undertakes to outline his position through a chronological reading of Eckhart's life and works, based upon the most up-to-date scholarship on Eckhart's scholarly career in Paris and Germany from c. 1260 until his condemnation for heresy in 1329. Flasch also relies on the most recent critical editions of Eckhart's work, such as the *Lectura Eckhardi* edited by Georg Steer and Loris Sturlese, and the fifth volume of the *Lateinische Werke* dedicated to Eckhart's trial and condemnation, also edited by Sturlese. This chronological examination, however, is supplemented by numerous addenda and digressions in which Flasch explores important themes, including how philosophy was defined as a "way of life" in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries when Eckhart was writing, rather than as an argumentative or rational tradition as it is today, and how the "Germanist" tradition of Eckhartian scholarship (spearheaded by Josef Quint in the early twentieth century and continued by Ruh) have privileged the vernacular German works of the Meister in order to substantiate their position that Eckhart was the premiere mystic of medieval Germany. This latter position, Flasch argues, is untenable because it ignores the fact that Eckhart never presented himself as writing a "mystical theology" at any point in his existing corpus, whereas he does

describe his output as philosophically and rationally motivated. Flasch thus begins his monograph with an overview of the rational and philosophical principles which Eckhart advocated across his writing (both the Latin scholastic treatises and the more popular German sermons) that grounds his wider analysis. In these “self-portrayals,” Flasch argues, Eckhart reveals his preference for a “radical reform of living” (p. 43) based on the metaphysical conviction that one’s soul shares in the superabundance of the divine Being. This is the new Christian philosophy as a “way of life” that Eckhart hoped to impart to his followers and students, and which saw him condemned for heresy by the Papal Courts at Avignon.

This theme is developed extensively throughout each chapter of Flasch’s study. At the same time, Flasch also provides a succinct introduction to the major texts which Eckhart composed throughout his lifetime, such as the Meister’s incomplete *Opus Tripartitum* (which was to consist of the philosophical groundwork that substantiated the Meister’s exegetical and homiletic preaching and writing), the vernacular Sermon Cycle on the Eternal Birth, the *Parisian Questions* debated amongst Eckhart’s scholastic peers, and the *Liber Benedictus* which contained a new “consolation of philosophy” based upon the Meister’s radical metaphysical principles. Through in-depth exegesis of selected passages from across Eckhart’s oeuvre, Flasch provides an excellent summary of some of the key ideas the Meister developed during his career. Always detailed and philological, these analyses from Flasch on diverse topics, such as Eckhart’s understanding of analogy and participation, exposition of the relationship between the One and the Many, and metaphysical doctrine of the flowing in and out of the Trinity, not only contribute to Flasch’s overall contention that Eckhart’s thought is philosophical rather than mystical, but also serve as excellent summaries of the major premises Eckhart advanced throughout his writing. Flasch also does a thorough job of outlining the sources for Eckhart’s positions, discussing texts, such as the *Book of the Twenty-Four Philosophers* or the writing of Dietrich of Freiberg, which are often overlooked in other scholarly work on the Meister. Unfortunately, in this volume Flasch does not discuss in detail the Arabic and Jewish sources that Eckhart employed across his writing, instead asking his readers to consult his earlier monograph of 2006. Regardless, in this book Flasch provides an exhaustive overview of Eckhart’s thought that is bound to be of benefit to future scholars of the Meister.

Schindel and Vanides are to be praised for their superb translation effort. They have managed to competently render Flasch’s distinctive style into English, consciously choosing to preserve the lengthy sentences and ruminations so characteristic of the philosopher’s prose. As they recognise in their preface to the volume, however, Flasch’s preference to avoid complex Latin neologisms in favour of idiomatic German is difficult to capture in English, where Latinate expressions and terminology have come to dominate philosophical vocabulary. So, whereas Flasch’s German prose is characterised by its accessibility, this English translation is definitely geared towards academic readers. The fidelity to Flasch’s preference for lengthy sentences may also seem particularly jarring to English readers unaccustomed to German writing. Yet *Meister Eckhart: Philosopher of Christianity* remains an engaging and enjoyable read and will surely become essential for anyone in the English academy who works on the

philosophy (or even mysticism!) of the Meister. Even should one ultimately disagree with his contention, Flasch's monograph demonstrates that Eckhart will always resist attempts at characterisation as a perennial outsider. For Eckhart as Christian philosopher remains to this day a condemned heretic, because the Church failed to appreciate or understand his revolutionary position.

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Postfeminist Digital Cultures: Femininity, Social Media, and Self-Representation.

Amy Shields Dobson

Palgrave Macmillan US, 2015; Hardcover; xi+ 202 pages; RRP US\$100.00; ISBN: 978-1-137-40839-6.

This book usefully examines the “social media practices” and “digital self-representations” of girls and young women that comes with increasing access to the Internet. Accordingly, it situates girls and young women as media and cultural producers, rather than consumers [emphasis added]. Dobson's main point for doing this is addressed in the introductory chapter, where she wishes to subvert “cultural commentators” who view girls' and young women's self-representation on digital media with moral panic; and in some cases, “disdain and contempt”. Ostensibly, Dobson's work contributes to a growing body of scholarship that frames girls and women as agentic and empowered individuals, in a postfeminist era.

In particular, this book stands out because it moves away from the dense, theoretical writing that plagues the scholarship on postfeminism. Dobson is meticulous in unpacking the implications and concerns of a postfeminist argument for a non-expert reader. This is important because she is not only able to highlight why her analyses on girls/young women's digital media practices are crucial, but in what ways a postfeminist reading of their digital self-representations is a topic worthy of focus. [emphasis added] Dobson lays substantial groundwork for a postfeminist framework in the second chapter. She dedicates a large part of the chapter to contextualising her project, starting first by delineating second-wave feminism; outlining the transition into a postfeminist era; and illustrating the emergence of ‘new’ postfeminist femininities.

Dobson neatly categorises her book into two distinct ways in which girls and young women (re)assert their digital identities as female and feminine. The first part of the book focuses on the way girls/young women portray themselves as ‘sexual beings’, and later, on girls/young women who convey their ‘authentic selves’ to be ‘judged’ by digital networked publics. Dobson takes on a calm, cool-headed approach from Chapters 3 to 6, in which she analyses the digital domains of social networking sites (SNS), sexting, and YouTube videos. She focuses to a lesser extent on blogs and forums. Instead of unidimensionally celebrating girls' and young women's postfeminist digital cultures and self-representations, Dobson discusses her findings in an astute and non-coercive

manner, which displays her vigour as a highly reflexive researcher; aware of her own research position.

Correspondingly, Chapters 3 and 4 examine the multifarious ways that girls and young women embellish their MySpace profiles and sext respectively. Though both chapters subscribe to the theme of the (re)production and circulation of sexy/sexual femininities, the two chapters differ in a sense that Chapter 3 attends to the construction of the “heterosexy feminine form” via ‘othered’ images such as those of the “dream girl”, Paris Hilton or “soft pornographic imagery”. Chapter 4 attends to the presentation of the sexual/sexualised self as more ‘real’ and ‘palpable’, because it provides a close reading of the circulation of girls’ personal raunchy photos online.

Both chapters are closely interwoven in that they come together to elucidate the difficulties of a postfeminist viewpoint. Dobson argues that despite the “limited and heteronormative ways” (75), scholars should not marginalise young women’s effort to (re)produce the heterosexy self on MySpace. She suggests that there is also a need to refrain from solely assuming that girls’ sexting is a process and outcome of them being prematurely sexualised, which inevitably situates girls as passive victims as in the discourse of sexualisation. She mentions that while there are instances in which concerns over sexualisation are not completely unfounded, highly precautionary responses only serve to reinforce and normalise the shame and risk around the outward portrayal of sexuality for girls. In essence, she seeks to remind the readers not to dismiss girls’ and young women’s sexy and sexual self-representations as counterproductive, harmful or unimportant, and opens up a space for thinking about “legitimate sexual attention-seeking” in a postfeminist era.

In moving on to analyse textual self-descriptions and girls’ narration and mediation of their insecurities online, Chapters 5 and 6 attends to the “contemporary feminine subjectivities” of girls and young women on the Internet. Chapter 5 looks at the assertive and confident self-making through decorative texts on young women’s public profiles on SNS. Dobson concurs that young women who simultaneously construct their digital identities as youthful and feminine, and unafraid of being ‘judged’ by spectators signal to a “brand” of young female subjectivity that is ideal in postfeminism.

However, as an antithesis to this, Chapter 6 examines the mediated ways girls ‘expose’ and broadcast themselves to particular networked publics. Girls who articulate their insecurities through “Am I Pretty or Ugly” videos on YouTube and girls who relate their experiences of emotional pain are theorised by Dobson to be “in crisis”. Dobson extends this argument to interrogate the type of responses assembled by the wider public to this growing trend, and points out that the former group of girls are frequently perceived as lacking value and values. While acknowledging that the latter group of girls who narrate and mediate pain are situated as somewhat ‘different’ and inherently ‘problematic’, Dobson concludes that postfeminist regulation and surveillance in networked publics should be central to future research in this field.

To sum up, while Dobson makes crucial points about girls’ and young women’s media practices, it is worth noting that the sources in which she bases her arguments on are backdated. This is not to say that a postfeminist perspective on mediated femininities on MySpace (now defunct) or “Am I Pretty or Ugly” videos on YouTube are

irrelevant or misplaced, it would be useful to see how Dobson's interpretations can be transposed to more current and popular SNS or popular culture material that are circulating amongst girls/young women today. Dobson only makes brief allusions to this in the afterword.

While Dobson's research contributes significantly to the issues and concerns that underlie girls' and young women's use of digital media, the cornerstone of Dobson's work lies unassumingly in a section of the introductory chapter. This is where she calls on the need to slow down the postfeminist analysis of girls, young women and digital cultures [emphasis added]. By calling upon readers and scholars in the field to slow down when it comes to "assessing youth digital cultures on political, social, and psychological levels", Dobson in a way emphasises on the need to (re)evaluate the complex terrain, and be astute towards the meanings that girls and young women attach to their media practices might not necessarily be those that adult social actors or researchers have ascribed. This is a crucial step forward in postfeminist scholarship, which inevitably also provides a head start for research in non-Western contexts, where work on postfeminism and postfeminist digital cultures has been scarce.

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Religious Women in Early Carolingian Francia: A Study of Manuscript Transmission and Monastic Culture.

Felice Lifshitz

Fordham Series in Medieval Studies, Fordham University Press, 2014, Hardback; pp. xxv, 349; 2 maps; 10 colour plates; RRP US\$55; ISBN 978-0-8232-5687-7.

Evidence for female education and literacy is difficult to find, especially in the early Middle Ages as much material has been lost or destroyed. Analysing eighth-century manuscripts which can be traced to the Main River Valley in Francia (Germany), Felice Lifshitz finds traces of editorial decisions which suggest female involvement. The cumulative effect of these creative and editing choices offer tantalising glimpses into a network of educated and intellectual women who influenced later thought. The argument is convincing and clearly explicated at each stage of the book. *Religious Women in Early carolingian Francia: A Study of Manuscript Transmission and Monastic Culture* is a valuable addition to the Fordham Series in Medieval Studies which promotes original studies in late antiquity and the medieval period.

The preface introduces the author's moment of recognition, when she realised that she had stumbled upon materials that offered support for Gerda Lerner's theories about 'feminist consciousness'.¹ Lifshitz had been describing the Anglo-Saxon manuscripts with terms like pro-woman, antimisogynistic, gender-egalitarian

¹ Gerder Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

and nonandrocentric (p. xviii), terms which suggested to her that the producers of these manuscripts were showing resistance to patriarchal ideals. What follows is a clearly structured and well-argued analysis of the environment in which female scholarship had the potential to flourish in the eighth century.

The book is structured around three parts. The first deals with 'People, Places and Things' discussed over three chapters; they provide the social, religious and cultural context within which the manuscripts were produced. 'Syneisactism and Reform; Gender Relations in the Anglo-Saxon Cultural Province in Francia' introduces the main players, Archbishop Lul of Mainz, Boniface and Loeba. Their social environment is demonstrated to have been egalitarian. This style of relationship is shown to have been disrupted by the Carolingian reforms in the ninth century, giving way to what has become a more familiar pattern of gender relationships. The next chapter, 'The Anglo-Saxon Cultural Province in Francia' focusses more directly on the religious institutions as insular forms of Christianity expand into the region. The final chapter in this section, 'The Gun(t)za and Abirhilt Manuscripts: Women and Their Books in the Anglo Saxon Cultural Province in Francia' provides a description of the manuscripts to be analysed in the next section, including their contents, noting the clear editorial choices made by their producers that mark them as different to others versions of similar texts.

The next section of the book consists of four chapters devoted to analysing excerpts from the manuscripts under question. Each chapter is given a biblical quotation in its heading which relates to the material within, underlining how the producers of these texts interpreted scripture. Some of these interpretations run counter to the ways they have been understood in other contexts, demonstrating the uniqueness of the material presented. The first of these chapters, "I am Crucified in Christ" (Galatians 2:20): The Kitzingen Crucifixion Miniature and Visions of the Apostle Paul" offers a detailed analysis and interpretation of the said crucifixion image, focussing on gender. Although images can be understood to simplify the message, thus compensating for a more 'somatic' version of spirituality presupposed for women, the complexity of this image belies this notion; as Lifshitz notes, on a single leaf, the creator of this image graphically offered ideas that would have otherwise taken dozens of written pages. As well as this, the viewer, whether male or female, was equally able to read themselves into the image.

The next three chapters are introduced with quotations from Corinthians, connecting the ideas within to some of the earliest biblical texts. Two of these chapters relate to adaptations of earlier saints' lives by the community of women. They are shown to have been selective both in which lives they decided to record, favouring texts like Gregory's *Homilies on the Gospels*, for example, over works by Tertullian. Lifshitz demonstrates how this selectiveness demonstrates a conscious decision on the part of the manuscript creators to offer positive images of women within the Christian domain. The second chapter looking at the use of saints' lives demonstrates how the development of more misogynist trends prompted the writing of more feminist works, specifically designed to "critique male domination" (p. 147)

The final chapter in this section describes the connection of written texts to the daily lives of the women within the communities of the Main Valley.

There are two conclusions in this book. The first pertains to the ambiguity of evidence for women's historical involvement in the liturgy, and the difficulty in challenging the consensus view, especially when the stakes for finding such evidence has the power to impact on modern institutions. The second is on the quest for historical networks of women whose works indirectly nurtured others in maintaining faith in female intellectual thought.

The notes for this book are extensive (about 75 pages) which indicates the depth and rigorousness of Lifshitz research. I personally prefer footnotes so that my reading is not interrupted by so much page turning, but this is a minor gripe. I was not conscious of editorial problems, except for the labelling of one map as "The Cardingian Rhineland". The clear structure and use of primary source material make this an ideal text for graduate students, and I have not hesitation in recommending its use as a model for them. The content is also very powerful, and I will certainly be using much of the information in my own work.

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